

Static in the Summer by 7elevensturpees

Category: Stranger Things - Fandom

Genre: 80's Music, Multi, digging the whole lucas and will ship, eleven return, hopper is protective af, joyce is one amazing mom, mixtapes, nancy is the older sister we all wish we had, post S1, stranger things, summertime

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Jim Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byer, Lucas Sinclair, Michael Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Original Characters, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Original Character, Nancy Wheeler/Steve Harrington, Will Byers/Lucas Sinclair

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-08-16

Updated: 2017-07-02

Packaged: 2022-04-02 01:36:15

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 7

Words: 23,192

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Six months, one week and three days.

It's been six months, one week and three days since Mike, Dustin, and Lucas were saved from the Demogorgon by Eleven, a uniquely gifted girl who made the ultimate sacrifice for her newly found friends. El destroyed the Demogorgon, but in the process disappeared into the unknown without a trace.

It's been six months, one week and three days since Will Byers was rescued from the terrifying Upside Down, but his return from the alternate dimension has been anything but smooth. From the constant flashbacks to the peculiar slug creatures he keeps vomiting up, the time he spent hiding from monsters may have taken a bigger toll on him than anyone realizes.

For six months, Mike has devoted all the time he has to trying to find his lost friend, and for six months his desperate calls have gone unanswered, until one night, El breaks the silence with a cryptic message for her three friends; find Seven, and save Eleven from the place she's lost in.

In the summer of '84 the foursome finds themselves in more danger than ever before and must find the mysterious entity called Seven in order to get Eleven the help she needs. It's time for Hawkins to become a little stranger.

1. Chapter One: The Message from Static

June 3rd, 1984
Hawkins, Indiana

"It's only for a week," Dustin groaned, "but who the hell wants to spend a week at some place called Camp Menominee? What even is a menominee?"

"It's a Native American tribe. They were based around the upper Michigan and Wisconsin area." Will remarked while packing away the small figures and paper money from the soul destroying game they had just completed.

Following group tradition, the boys organized the annual summer starter sleepover in Mike's basement on the night of the last day of school. Because Dungeons and Dragons was a little too complicated for four boys entering the fifth grade, the boys had played a slightly less exciting but still entertaining game of Monopoly, and the tradition had stuck ever since. The summers before fifth and sixth, Lucas had crushed them all by a whopping \$1500 dollars at least, but the summer before seventh grade Dustin was declared champion in the ultimate comeback story. This year, the tension between Henderson and Sinclair was so high it would take a satellite to see it. But in a turn of events no one could have predicted, Will played an unpredictably good game, trashing Lucas' all time record of \$3500 and earning incredibly well deserved bragging rights for the next year.

Not only was the Monopoly/sleepover combination important to group tradition, but it was also needed to finalize the plans for the newest campaign of Dungeons and Dragons. The campaign that had been planned since the start of May, taking countless hours to organize, to shop for the perfect snacks, to save money for the completely necessary pizza order, and to convince their parents to let them spend 10+ hours in Mike's basement, had been planned to set off on Monday...when Dustin dropped a bombshell; he was going to a two week summer camp in Michigan. Will then shyly piped up he was spending Sunday through Thursday at his father's place in the city, much to his brother's dismay. At the news of their absences,

Mike groaned and looked to Lucas, hoping he was going to have a free day, but he was slumped down on the table with a look of utter annoyance.

“Listen, at least five of your super freaky cousins aren't coming to stay with you until school starts, and you're being forced into spending three full days a week with them.” Lucas grumbled, and Mike stared in disbelief at his friend's face to see if he was messing with them.

“Five? As in one, two, three, four, *five*?? Jesus your aunt must be like, ripping in half.” Will gaped. Dustin snickered as he packed away the Monopoly game board in the empty slot on the shelf behind him while Lucas slammed his head on the table in annoyance and started counting his cousins off on his fingers.

“Junior, Margo, Elijah, and then the twins. None of them are even close to our age.”

“You cannot be serious,” Mike inquired.

“Well, there's Margo, but she's freaking 16. Twins are 18, Junior's 7 and then Lijah is 3...I think.”

“Question,” Dustin piped up, “This Margo...is she hot?” Lucas turned his head and glared daggers at his friend.

“Number one, that is my cousin, so that's gross. And number two, the last time I saw her, which was maybe two years ago, she had major brace face, huge glasses and a lisp worse than yours.” Lucas jabbed, and Dustin lunged over the table then popped him in the head. That lead to a miniature brawl between the two boys, while Will laughed at their attempted display of bravado.

Mike wasn't laughing though. While his friends fought with each other and insulted each other, he was silently looking at the small blanket fort and the walkie talkie that he hadn't touched in over five months. Eleven had been completely silent ever since their last encounter with the monster from the Upside Down. Yes, it was gone, and no one had gone missing since, but El had disappeared without a trace, or a way to contact the boys, which worried the living hell out

of Mike.

He had tried to find her almost everyday during AV Club, calling her name out into static and silence. When Mike got super obsessed with finding where she was, he would spend hours in the small closet where the radio sat, forgetting to eat, sleep, or even sip on water. Most days Lucas would place a supportive hand on Mike's shoulder as Dustin would tell funny stories or made up misadventures about the girl with the shaved head.

What would Eleven do if she couldn't find any Eggos where she was?

If El was into a comic book series, what would it be? Lucas claimed El would hate comics, while Will and Dustin bickered over whether she was more likely to be a Batman fan or Avengers fan.

Do you think Eleven would be a fan of Tom Cruise like Nancy was? Discuss.

Mike once stayed on the radio for 9 straight hours because he swore up and down that he heard her whisper his name. Mr. Clarke had to call Nancy to get her zealot brother to go home and sleep. Nancy saw how much her brother cared about El and took him on a late night drive through the woods, so he could get all the tears and anger he was harboring out of his system. That night, after they had successfully snuck back into the house, Mike laid in his bed tossing and mumbling. He started wondering if losing El was worth anything that came after her disappearing. His old friend was back, and the town was safe, but she was gone. She wasn't with him. By the time the sun's early morning rays glimmered through the window, he had concluded that expressing this to his friends would have lead to the most screwed up deep conversations about feelings, which they all despised due to their awkward nature. There wouldn't be any response that was both logical and not offensive; so Mike avoided opening up to his friends.

When he caught sight of Wheeler's solemn gaze on the blankets, Lucas pushed Dustin away, moved next to Mike, and clapped a hand down on his left shoulder. The little gesture, while it didn't seem to mean a lot, meant everything to Mike. It meant that someone that wasn't him needed to find El. It meant someone else thought she was

still alive.

"Mike, wherever she is, she's fine. El's braver and stronger than any of us here, right guys?" Lucas reassured his distraught friend, who looked back to see what his other two party members were doing. Dustin had cracked open a container of chocolate pudding he had stolen from the lunch lady, and was happily eating it by the stairwell. Mike was reading one of the newest X-Men comics.

"I said, *right guys?*" he repeated, and the other two boys immediately caught the drift and began to reassure Mike while confirming Lucas was correct.

Mike snorted, and gazed on the walkie talkie under the blankets. He had been given a new one for Christmas and it produced a signal strong enough to reach all the way to Dustin's house, almost 3/4 of a mile away. Mike immediately put his new one into the basement and tried to desperately find El, find her slightly raspy and sweet broken speech, find her saying his name in anyway. The frantic search attempt was heartbreaking, with Mike screaming for his friend and finally breaking down into tears when he only received white noise back. It hadn't been touched in a few months, and Mike had begun to doubt he would ever use it again.

Then, one by one, the lamps began to flicker.

Mike's heart stopped, dead in its tracks. Will's breath hitched ever so slightly, and Dustin dropped his snack pack of pudding, the chocolate goo splattering across the floor. Lucas looked back and forth from friend to friend, and sputtered out what appeared to be something to the effect of;

"Mike, don't sta-

"El." Mike whispered, and dove for the receiver. The rest of the boys scrambled across the basement and crowded around the transmitter as Mike frantically tuned the dial up and down the airways.

"El! Are you okay? Can you hear me? Please, say something?! Anything!" he begged. Nothing but static responded to his pleas. He groaned and tried again, his face twisting in frustration and anger.

Dustin pushed his hat back out of his face while frantically pacing and whispering, “Shit shit shit shit shit shit.”

“He’s gonna get himself locked in a looney bin if he never lets her go,” Will whispered under his breathe to Lucas, who pursed his lips and nodded in solemn agreement. Every time the electricity surged even a slight bit, Mike would go ballistic and try to find El’s voice using any radio available.

Watching his friend drive himself insane caused Will an unreasonable amount of anxiety and guilt. The nightmares and flashbacks of being trapped in the Upside Down had lessened in intensity over the past few months, but he still hadn’t found a solution to vomiting up the slugs, nor had he even attempted to reveal it to anyone. There had been a few close calls since his return, almost vomiting in front of the class during his presentation on the French Revolution on the day before Spring Break. Thankfully, he held down the slimy creature while he explained the significance of the guillotine and ended the overly detailed and slightly macabre speech by excusing himself to the bathroom.

The electricity surged again, and this time Nancy flew down the stairs and crashed into the support beam at the bottom of the staircase. His parents had gone out to a cocktail party and weren’t expected to be back until quite late, so Mike’s older sister elected herself to take care of everything while her parents got a much deserved break. Holly on the other hand was spending the majority of the summer with the Wheeler’s grandparents in Ohio, bringing the volume in the house down to an almost eerie low.

“Mike, what the fu-*frack*,” she corrected herself, chest heaving up and down, “is it Eleven?”

“No idea, but it’s definitely bad.” Dustin chimed in, still pacing around the basement muttering to himself.

Mike held the receiver to his forehead and closed his eyes. “C’mon El, give me something,” he whispered as a single tear fell down his cheek.

And just like that, the walkie talkie crackled to life with a familiar,

soft breathing, and the hesitant rasp of Eleven's voice.

"Mike?"

Mike nearly choked on his tongue and laughed in celebration. "Oh thank God! There you go El, there you go," he sighed in relief as his eyes welled with tears. Lucas whooped and threw a fist in the air, and Dustin grabbed Will and Nancy and hugged them triumphantly.

"Where are you El? Is it the Upside Down," Mike questioned, before adding a hesitant, "over?"

The radio was silent with crackling static again, and for three seconds the boys and Nancy worried she was gone again, until her voice piped up once more.

"No. I'm home. But it's dark, and hot. Too hot."

"Maybe that's not the Upside Down then, it was super cold there." Will said, and Nancy nodded. They waited for El to finish her statement with an over, until they realized she wasn't as used to talking on the walkie talkie as the boys.

"El, when you finish your statement, you say 'over.' That way, we don't interrupt you. Over." Lucas coached. Dustin gestured for the walkie talkie, and Mike hesitantly handed over the handheld.

"Okay. O-ver."

"Good, just like that," Dustin grinned, and El gave a shortened little laugh over the radio. It was music to Mike's ears

"El, when you say you're home, are you in Mike's basement? Over."

"Yes. Over."

"Can you make the lights here flicker from there?" Lucas asked, and the lights all surged from near dead, to so bright they couldn't be looked at. Will gasped, because he had never seen El's full range of power. Nancy was also in a state of shock, while Dustin quietly whispered, "Wicked."

Mike snatched the walkie talkie back out of Dustin's hand, despite his protesting hey. "El, we're gonna bring you home. We'll have a big stack of Eggo's waiting for you, and new clothes, and you can come back for Fourth of July. It'll be okay. Over." His frantic anxiety began to bubble over into his voice as his emotions began to get the best of him.

"Promise?" the girl's voice trembled over the intercom and another tear ran down Mike's face.

"I promise." Mike whispered. Suddenly, the light bulb hanging above the table burst, spraying glass and filament all over the stained wood. Each lamp started to explode and spark out, the popping light bulbs scattering debris across the basement. Eleven began to breathe heavily and whimper in fear, "No, please no." and Mike clutched the transmitter and screamed, "El, wait!"

The strand of Christmas lights Will had suggested to hang up for decoration on the walls was going off like crazy. Each individual light flickered back and forth at ridiculous speed, while the rest of the lights in the basement burst. Dustin, Nancy and Will fell to the floor and tried to shelter themselves as Lucas dove under the blanket fort's cover.

"Mike, find Seven. Need Seven." Eleven whispered, cut off by a sudden loud screech and roar, and the transmission cut out to loud static.

"Nononononononononono," Mike stood up and started panicking, tuning the stations back and forth trying to find the mystery girl's voice again. But she was gone. He slammed the device down onto the table and screamed at the top of his lungs. He sank to his knees and began to cry, leaning against the table for support while Nancy sat down next to him and held him against her. He curled into her shoulder and bawled while his friends began to pick up the pieces of shattered glass and light bulbs.

"She was here, why did she have to go," Mike's voice croaked, and Nancy shushed him and smoothed his hair down.

"She's okay at least, right?" Nancy comforted her brother while

Lucas, Dustin and Will sadly looked at their friend, shaking and crying from sheer emotional overload.

After an hour or so, Nancy swept up the final shards of glass, and the boys rolled out their sleeping bags and began the sleepover tradition of whispering secrets on the basement ground. Round after round of truth or dare led to Mike getting wedged by Dustin, Will confessing his secret crush on Brooke Shields, and Lucas explaining the foolproof way to get a girl to kiss you.

After hours of goofing around, the boys passed out and laid snoring on the basement floor. Except for Mike, who was clutching the radio to his chest and trying to stay awake in case Eleven came back to talk to him. He had so much he wanted to say to her, but couldn't word it right. Finally, exhausting won and Mike closed his eyes and fell into a deep sleep.

The radio turned itself on, and all of a sudden, someone began to sing softly. It was a girl, who was maybe just a tad older than the boys themselves. Her voice was sweet and soft, with hints of roughness when she went low. There were no lyrics, just notes and chords of a lullaby no one knew. Her song felt sad and lonely, and as the boys slept her song crept into their heads and permeated their dreams with her sorrow.

2. Chapter Two: The New Weirdos on Cherry Lane

June 6th, 1984

Monday came, and it was bittersweet. The boys had woken up extra early to have breakfast with Dustin and Will before both of them left. They met yawning and rubbing their eyes in the local diner and each ate their greasy yet satisfying breakfast platters in near silence, none of them really knowing what to say. This wouldn't be the first summer they weren't all together; one summer Dustin's entire family took a long winded road trip to Colorado, costing him almost a month of his summer, and Lucas always spent the Thursday before school start in Chicago with his Uncle Johnny, who, according to him, only liked to listen to motown and old Ella Fitzgerald records, and always took his nephew to see one R-rated movie while he was in his care.

But for some reason, as the boys sat in the run-down vinyl booth and listened to the out-dated jukebox music, this last meal felt different; as if this separation would be the hardest one yet.

Finally, Lucas slammed his fork down on the table. "I can't believe that you guys really gotta leave today," he complained. "Meanwhile, I'm stuck with the Sinclair Family Circus and Wheeler's sixth grader looking ass."

"Hey, at least I can grow a mustache," Mike raised his eyebrow and wiggled his upper lip, which proudly boasted three dark hairs. Lucas scrunched his face in confusion, then snorted.

"Yeah, that one single hair you got there is *really* one excellent looking mustache."

Will nearly sprayed the mouthful of orange juice all over the table, a few dribbles of it spilling all over his shirt and his chin. The table exploded with laughter and snorts, and the two other customers glared at the group of boisterous boys. Dustin ended up laughing so hard he nearly peed his pants, and Lucas cackled himself underneath the table, slamming his head on the way back up. This sparked a whole new round of roars, and even the waitress began to giggle at

the teary eyed table.

As the waitress came over to the table with a piece of paper, the boys began to root through their pockets for change and dollar bills to cover their breakfasts.

“No, no,” Mae, an older woman with black hair streaked with gray hair, insisted, “it's on the house today. Never in my life have I seen a group of people laugh that hard at 7 in the morning, and that fact there made my day.”

Each boy looked down at the table, looking sheepish and blushing while mumbling an appreciative, “Thank you.”

They all left the diner full and in good spirits, and began to race back to their neighborhoods on their bikes, ragging on each other and trying to maintain control of their bikes so they didn't crash while giggling.

The posse braked hard in front of Dustin's driveway, where his father stood packing up the family car and his mother stood watching in the doorway.

“Good morning, Mr. Henderson,” Mike, Lucas and Will briefly acknowledged their friend's dad, and Mr. Henderson gave a curt, “Hello, boys,” in response. Dustin glanced back at his friends, giving them each a quick hug and walking his bike into the open garage. He stood by the car door and waved to the others as they pushed off and rode away.

The quickest way to Will's house was taking Mirkwood, but after the incident in November the boys didn't dare step foot near the road. So instead, they took the long way, riding back around, passing Mike's house and Lucas' cul-de-sac before finally turning and racing down the dirt road leading to Will's house. Will's mom was waiting on the front porch with a blanket wrapped around her shoulders and a freshly lit Camel in her hand.

“Well good morning to you boys,” she smiled and took a short puff of her cigarette.

“Morning Ms. Joyce,” Will and Lucas replied, while Will greeted his mother with a hug before ducking into the house.

“Lucas, is it true your cousins are coming to town?” Joyce inquired as she blew smoke into the early June morning.

“Yes mamn, for the whole summer. Plus, my Aunt Daisy is coming,” Lucas answered respectfully, which made Mike snigger. Lucas was a loud mouth until it came to adults. If anyone above the age of 21 said anything to him he instantly turned into the picture of perfect etiquette.

“Oh wow, I haven't spoken to Daisy in years. She was so funny when we were in high school. Where's she living now?”

“Baltimore, I think. They like the food.”

Joyce threw her head back and laughed, “Well if there ever was a reason for Daisy to live somewhere, food is it.”

Lucas and Mike chuckled, and Will came flying out of the front door holding two small black objects. As he approached Mike realized they were mixtapes.

“What are these for?” Lucas asked, and Will blushed shyly.

“Jonathan showed me how to make one last week, and I wanted to give you guys something unique,” Will began to stutter and get flustered. “I don't know, maybe it's dumb-”

“No, that's really...cool actually. Thanks a lot Will.” Mike beamed, and his friend turned beet red from sheer embarrassment.

“Yeah, I'm digging it, Byers,” Lucas punched his friend's shoulder affectionately and checked his watch.

“*Shit!* I promised my mom I'd be back at 8 to help with my cousins. Catch you later,” he said, and pedaled away. Will waved to him until his friend disappeared from the dirt road.

“I still have time, can I stay here till you have to leave?” Mike asked Will. Will turned to Joyce, who nodded and gestured for him to come

inside. Mike tossed his bike down next to Will's and dashed up to stairs into the house.

Lucas cut through his backyard and nearly crashed into the station wagon parked out front. He muttered some swear words under his breath and ducked into the garage, weaving around the gardening tools and throwing open the door leading into his living room, the TV playing the morning news with the sound muted, so the sound of laughter and music could be heard clearly through the whole first level. The youngster ran up the stairs and stood in the entryway of his kitchen, taking in the sight before him.

His mom was standing by the sink, cuddling up to her husband as they sipped on cups of steaming coffee. Aunt Daisy was seated at the head of the table, and while her chair was facing him, she was talking to his parents in the kitchen. Three of his cousins, Mac, Junior and Gela, were all hunched over their plates of grits and bacon, with a huge plate of eggs sat in the very center of the table, shoveling breakfast into their mouths like starving animals. The oldest boy, Mac, glanced up into the doorway and noticed Lucas observing the scene. "Well it's about damn time you showed up little man," Mac joked, grinning like the cat who ate the canary. The rest of his family turned their attention to Lucas before he cleared his throat and nervously said, "Hiya guys."

Aunt Daisy nearly leapt out of her chair and gathered her nephew in a tight hug while screaming in delight. Daisy was his mother's sister, and boy they couldn't be any different without being strangers. Daisy was short and plump while Lucas' mother was willowy and quite thin. Where his mother was soft spoken and calm, Daisy was often very loud and reckless. Her volume and her erratic behavior was best reflected in her five kids, Mac, Gela, Margo, Elijah, and Junior.

Mac and Gela (stemming from Angela, but why Gela chose to use the last syllable for the nickname versus a classic Anne was a mystery to anyone in the family) were the oldest two, and complimented each other's personalities almost perfectly. Both possessed intelligence that was borderline untestable, and with that intelligence came an uncanny ability to manipulate every detail of their surroundings to "influence the greatest personal benefits." But what Aunt Daisy didn't know was that they often

used their powers for a more...malefic purpose. Most of the family reunions and holidays were spent making Lucas look stupid or tricking him into some embarrassing fiasco. Some of their highlights included Christmas of '80 (Lucas agreed to a game of hide and seek and got himself wrapped into a box for two hours), Christmas '81 (Lucas accidentally pantsed the mall Santa in front of a line of screaming children), and Easter '82 (something so traumatizing everyone in the family was forbidden by Aunt Daisy to speak about it).

In other words, they were evil.

Elijah was only 3 but already obsessed with being exactly like his oldest siblings. He had taught himself how to read and speak when he was 2, and insisted on being called Lijah, just like his hero Gela. Lijah worshiped the ground his sister walked on and would do anything for her approval. This included but was not limited to theft, playing the innocent child in a charity scam, and getting violent with anyone who had anything bad to say.

If Lucas liked anyone the most out of the bunch, it was Junior. The boy just turned 7 years old and ever since the day he was born, not a person knew why, but he wouldn't say a word. Junior was smart, but not as smart as the twins. He was athletic but not like his sister. Never had a mean comment about his bandana or his obsession with the Army, and destroyed card games. He was the perfect companion.

Then, there was Margo. Margo was the oddest duck out of them. She was always on another planet, had her head way up in space, or was just wandering aimlessly. Lucas' close-aged cousin never cared a lick about how she looked, and therefor appeared absolutely insane some days. Hair unbrushed and tangled into knots the size of small bird's nests, thick heavy glasses with the braces to match (thank god she didn't have headgear, she may not have made it out of middle school alive) and a sad miscommunicated fashion sense that made even the homeless people on the street stop her to check her sanity. Lucas cringed in fear of how awkward his cousin would be now. At least she was a fan of Dungeons and Dragons.

Back in the kitchen, Daisy was now examining her young nephew and clicking her tongue in disapproval.

"Maggie, your boy so skinny he's gone waste away by October," Aunt Daisy tutted, "Don't y'all ever feed him?"

Her once gravelly voice had now blended with a thick Southern accent, forcing all the emphasis on the first syllable in the word. Things like ever became "ev-ah," boy to "bo-ay," and skinny to "skin-nae."

"He's always out with his friends on his bike, Daisy. That just burns up all his food I guess."

"That ain't no reason to look like a coat rack when ya stretch your arms out." Daisy fussed.

Mr. Sinclair snorted and Lucas' mother smacked her husband in his chest playfully. Mac and Gela pushed out from the table and double teamed their young cousin, giving a tightly squeezing hug that lasted just a tad too long for Lucas. Lijah wrapped himself around Lucas' left leg and shrieked in delight when his older cousin tried to shake him off.

"Oh we missed you deeply, Lukey Pie," Gela cooed while pinching Lucas' cheek. Mac began to walk around his relative while humming every three seconds.

"Mac, what are you doing?" Lucas asked, avoiding all the profanity he wanted to spew.

"Figuring out what's different about you. You're not that much taller, you're also not any fatter..."

"Maybe he got slightly shorter? Slimmer perhaps?" Gela stood shoulder to shoulder with her brother, their similar faces in close proximity calling attention to their definite relation. Same caramel brown skin, same light green eyes, coarse black hair styled into nappy twists on Mac and the tiny cornrow braids on the side of Gela's head giving her the illusion of having shaved half her hair off. In a word, his cousins looked cool.

Going out with his extended family in public always drew stares and whispers. His cousins were mixed race, with a white father and a black mother, so their complexion faired much lighter than Lucas'. And with Aunt Daisy being particularly dark skinned and her "rotten pathetic lying cheating bastard of a husband" (her words exactly) not in the lives of his

children, the speculation that her children were adopted came up no matter what. That would cause Daisy to spin into such a tizzy, not a thing could calm her down. A particular store clerk in Indianapolis had made the mistake of calling Lucas “a definite match for your offspring” while telling the twins they were more than likely adopted and or a product of “cheating gone wrong.”

Needless to say they were banned from entering that Smart Shopper’s Mart and the clerk agreed to not press charges even after he sustained a sprained ankle, dislocated shoulder and a concussion from the sheer force of the aunt’s shoe colliding with the back of his skull.

However, if there was anyone in the family that was likely adopted, it was Margo. Margo’s skin was extremely lighter than everyone’s, to the point that you couldn’t tell if she was mixed or just white. The red tones of her curly hair was a uniquely beautiful feature of Lucas’ cousin. Unlike her siblings, Margo’s eyes were a deep brown so dark they were borderline black. Although Aunt Daisy swore up and down that Margo was one of her babies, Lucas had the creeping suspicion that his cousin never really believed her anyway.

“Lucas, Junior and Mac will be bunking with you,” Mr. Sinclair told his son, whose jaw practically unhinged and fell to the floor. “Their luggage is at the bottom of the stairs, help them get settled before lunch.”

“Wait, like in my room? For the whole summer?? I barely fit in there, how am I gonna fit him,” Lucas whined, gesturing to his 6’3” cousin, “plus Junior.” His father shot him the ‘I dare you to complain again because I will throw the nearest object at your mouth’ look. Lucas rolled his eyes and groaned.

“Fine, jeez. Lijah, get off I gotta walk now.”

“No,” pouted his baby cousin, who was suddenly detached from his tube sock by Junior, who then promptly handed the squirming toddler to his older sister.

Junior hadn’t changed a bit; short and stocky, with darker skin than his siblings and expressive hazel eyes tucked behind long thick eyelashes. It was a constant complaint of Gela and Margo that Junior’s eyelashes were just beautiful that way, or that he didn’t deserve a gift he didn’t know how

to properly utilize.

"Hello, Junior," Mrs. Sinclair grinned at her nephew and hugged him tightly. "Doing alright babycakes?"

Junior smiled and nodded, and gave a quick nod to his uncle, cleaning up the breakfast dishes.

"Your momma told me you're gonna play football when you get to middle school, is that right?" Lucas' dad asked and Junior nodded once again. He then turned to look at Lucas and rolled his eyes.

They always like this? Junior's expression seemed to ask, and Lucas chuckled in response.

Lucas trucked it over to the staircase and picked up two plastic suitcases, a red shiny one covered in bumper stickers, band logos, and decals, and a plain mustard yellow bag with scratches all over the case. The yellow one was fine, but Lucas almost keeled over when he tried to lift the red one.

"Mac, what did you pack in here, a dead body?" Lucas heaved at the handle as the case barely seemed to move, and a loud rattling came from the case. Mac froze in his tracks, holding a finger to his lips. Aunt Daisy's voice carried from the kitchen to the staircase.

"Y'all boys okay?"

"There's something wrong with Mac's suitcase," Lucas smirked, and winked at his cousin as his eyes widened in shock.

"Consider this payback for Easter." Lucas whispered, and Junior sucked air through his teeth in horror from remembering that traumatic event.

From the kitchen, there was a single beat of silence before the warning tone of his aunt's anger

"Malachi Roman Sinclair if you brought what I think you brought in your suitcase boy I sweartagahd I'm boutta whoop your ass right here right now all the way back to Baltimore."

Mac turned so pale Lucas could practically see all the veins in his face.

"Oh no, here comes the executioner," he whispered, and fell to his knees praying, "Jesus, please! Protect me from evil and deliver me from Sin!"

Aunty Daisy flipped the latch and the suitcase exploded with stuff. Records, headphones, cassette tapes, Walkmans, and a giant silver boom box. Lucas' aunt stared down at the mess from the suitcase, and Gela began to sing a funeral march, Lijah babbled along, and Aunty reached down, removed her plain black ballet flat, and held it in her hand. Junior and Lucas jogged up the stairs and pressed themselves flat against the wall that the furious woman's back was facing.

Mac on the other hand, was dead silent and stiller than a statue. It seemed as if all the air had been sucked out of his lungs, and the room was so quiet, Lucas' parents stuck their heads out of the kitchen to watch the showdown.

Then, at last, Aunty Daisy snapped.

"I CANNOT BELIEVE THE AUDACITY OF YOUR DUMBASS," she roared and charged like a bull at her son, who screamed, then attempted to flee to the sitting room, but the shoe had already made contact with his shoulder.

As Lucas watched his aunt relentlessly whack his cousin with her size 6.5 slipper, screaming and cursing to the gods, the sheer hilarious nature of the scene caused him to erupt with laughter. Gela and Lijah joined in, while Lucas' mother covered her mouth with her hand so you couldn't see her smiling. Lucas turned to look at Junior, who was laughing so hard no noise was coming out minus the occasional gasp of air.

"Mac she's shorter than you, just dodge her dammit!" Mac's uncle shouted words of encouragement and wisdom at his nephew. The words weren't working, as Mac couldn't dodge a single blow to his body.

"Wow, what did he do this time," a new voice asked, and Lucas looked up the stairs to see a complete stranger.

"Who are you?"

"Lucas, don't play that with me. A girl gets her braces removed and suddenly she's some boarder in your house?"

“Wait...Margo?”

“In the flesh,” the girl clicked her tongue and flashed a metal free, pearly white, while Lucas stared flabbergasted.

His awkward ugly duckling cousin had done a complete 180° in the two years they'd been apart. Her preteen body had developed and matured, most of the baby fat had given way to lean muscle, except for a small little pocket of chub on her stomach. Margo had learned to apply makeup; hazy brown eyeshadow, blue eyeliner in the rim under her eye, and bright red lipstick, like a toy car. Even her style had gotten much better, with a red and white striped t-shirt tucked into a ripped up pair of jeans, with a big black fist patch embroidered onto the back pocket. The thick prescription glasses had been tossed all together in favor of contacts, and her copper auburn hair looked detangled with each curl defined perfectly.

Shifting his focus away from his one cousin and back to the other, Mac managed to quickly clean the mess of technology back into his suitcase then escape up the stairs to lock himself away in Lucas' room, while Daisy stood at the bottom of the stairs yelling to God.

“AND IF I EVER CATCH YOU BEING FOOLISH AGAIN I’M USING A BELT NOT A DAINTY LITTLE SHOE!” she finished, and stormed off towards the kitchen to sit down and fume over more coffee.

Lucas looked to each of his cousins in order to confirm they were safe, and they all breathed a collective sigh of relief.

“Eh, that one was pretty tame. You should've seen the one she gave me two weeks ago,” Gela recalled blankly, then shuddered. “I still can't look at a wooden spoon the same way.”

“Or me with the clipboard,” Margo added.

“Junior with the notebook.”

Lucas turned to look at his cousin, who held his palms up and shrugged in response. He pulled a small notepad from his back pocket, scribbled something, then showed it to Lucas.

I had an attitude about school, it happens right?

"Been there, lived that," Lucas snickered and helped Junior grab his suitcase and haul it up to Lucas' room.

Mac had somehow already set up a record player on the window seat, and began to play a Temptations record. For some odd reason, his cousins listened to older music versus the newest tracks, although Mac seemed to always know the top 25 tracks of the Billboard Hot 100's list. While Lucas often listened to bands like Van Halen and Michael Jackson, the twins and Lijah could be seen singing along to people like Bob Marley, Ray Johnson and old Stevie Wonder music. Junior was more like Lucas, as he preferred Whitney Houston and Janet Jackson, but no one could dance better to Marvin Gaye.

"I will never understand why y'all listen to such boring music," Lucas said, while Mac swayed back and forth snapping in rhythm to the music. Junior began unpacking his suitcase, laying his shorts and shirts together in outfits, complete with underwear and socks. "If you're staying in my room, we're listening to my music."

Mac blew out an exasperated sigh and switched off the record player, picking the seven inch off the turntable and sliding it back into its cover. Lucas took the mixtape Will had given him out of his pocket and turned it over in his slender fingers. It was labeled in green pen "Lucas' Mix: Summer of '84" with Will's familiar handwriting.

Ever since Will's return from the Upside Down, Lucas had an unexplainable and fiercely protective attitude towards his younger friend. As peculiar as it was, Will wasn't the same person he used to be; in fact a lot of the things he used to love he couldn't stand now, like scary movies and Slushee drinking contests, the rushing cold feeling in his head and body often sending him into spiraling panic attacks. He was also paler, with hollowed out cheeks and dark circles deepening to a purple bruise color. Not that Lucas could blame him, because if he had to live with the kind of memories that his friend did, he wouldn't get any sleep either.

Lucas inserted the tape and hit the play button, and the first notes of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" drifted through the speakers, and Mac laughed out loud and clapped his hand.

"Oh, I listen to boring music? This is the most borin-"

He was interrupted by Lucas, who shushed him and threw a balled up pair of socks at him. Queen had a special place in Lucas' heart, because Will's older brother had shown it to Will and in turn Will showed it to his friends, Lucas being the first one to hear so. At first it was confusing, and then it was interesting, and then it was amazing. The drums and the harmonies and especially the piano made the rhapsody everything the boy had wanted it to be. Despite it almost being a ten year old song.

As the song progressed and it changed from a slow sad tune to a loud banging rock song, Mac and Junior had slowly began to nod their heads in time to the music and by the end of the song, Mac was dancing through the room dramatically singing along the best he could, making Lucas laugh and Junior roll his eyes while smiling.

Gela and Margo stuck their heads in the room, and Margo exclaimed, "OH THIS SONG IS MY SHIT THOUGH!" She slid next to her brother and started shaking her shoulders and wiggling her hips perfectly on beat. Gela snorted with laughter in the doorway and flopped down next to Lucas on his bed.

The song ended, but it immediately switched to "Should I Stay or Should I Go," one of Will's favorite songs which had grown on Lucas after he played it for the hundredth time. Margo seemed to instantly recognize it, strumming an imaginary air guitar and banging her hair. Mac imitated her and began to sing the vocals.

Maybe this summer won't be bad after all, Lucas thought as he watched his family rock out to the music.

Notes for the Chapter:

i couldn't wait to post a new chapter i was really so excited.

THANK YOU SO MUCH TO EVERYONE JUST BTW
YOUR COMMENTS AND YOUR KUDOS MEAN THE
WORLD TO ME

enjoy your weekend and never stop being exactly as
you are :)

3. Chapter Three: When Nancy Met Margo

June 8th, 1984

Two days. That's all it took.

After two days, Lucas was already used to his cousins constantly invading his personal space. He had stopped protesting being elbowed in the ribs by both Junior and Lijah while brushing his teeth, and learned to ignore the daily shouting matches that Gela and Margo orchestrated over a myriad of boring subjects at varying times in the day. The pantry was almost always empty or all the good snacks had been taken, and trying to watch a show was impossible unless you got there first and claimed captain of the TV for your program.

When his mother wasn't telling Lucas to be nice to his cousins and let them treat him like a servant, his father was. It took approximately one fight with Mac over personal space for him to learn his lesson about fighting in the presence of his retired Army ranger father; you'd have to be a complete fool to do so.

Dustin's first letter arrived on Wednesday, and it pained Lucas to hear that his friend was actually having the time of his life camping. His camp counselor was cool enough to take them on the zip line and giant rock wall every single day, not to mention the archery, scary stories (Dustin told the story of the Demogorgon and scared the pants off half his bunkmates), s'mores by the pound, swimming in Lake Michigan, canoe trips with the Girl Scout camp from Sturgeon Bay, and apparently even trips to the town to buy candy and 7-Eleven Slurpees. The boys in his cabin were from all over the place; some from Ohio, quite a few from Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, even one boy named Jack from Canada. Jack was apparently the funniest person Dustin had ever met, and told lots of crazy stories about how much fun Canada was.

Lucas hated Jack from Canada.

He had also gotten a phone call from Will in the city. As awful of a parent Lonnie usually was, the younger boy seemed to be enjoying

himself. Lonnie had taken him to a baseball game, they went to the movies and they'd seen the brand-new *Ghostbusters*. For the first day Lonnie didn't drink until the sun went down, and instead kept the drunken outburst confined to his apartment. The next morning was of course greeted with apologies and presents of Will's choosing. Jonathan decided to go with Will to keep his brother safe, but after two days had left in a huff after an argument turned ugly. Lucas had seen him make the sharp turn into town with a deep-set scowl on his face before he sped off towards his house.

Despite his brother's abrupt departure, Will was overjoyed about his father taking him to a new exhibit in the city's art museum about some fancy modern artist from the 60's. How Lonnie had enough to afford it was beyond anyone but Will sounded like his heart was gonna fall out of his chest from excitement. That worried Lucas ever so slightly (according to Will's doctor at the hospital and Mrs. Joyce's constant worrying, Will wasn't strong enough to be overexcited for long periods of time due to the malnutrition he'd suffered since he came out of the Upside Down) but he couldn't bring himself to rain on his friend's parade.

Meanwhile back in Hawkins, Mike was getting more and more obsessive over El's message about Seven. Everyday he hauled an overstuffed binder full of newspaper clippings, pictures, and stories about Hawkins Lab and the MK Ultra project, trying to find the participants and track down them and their families. So far, he'd come up empty handed. It was forcing him down so much, his entire body had seemed to succumb to gravity until the bounce in his run faded away. His dark circles grew darker than ever before, and since the end of spring break, he'd apparently lost close to four pounds. He was wasting away.

Mrs. Wheeler had called Lucas' mom in desperate need of advice to make him eat, but there wasn't anything Mrs. Sinclair could say to get food into someone who wasn't hungry (Mrs. Sinclair was a psychologist and was the person Will went to go see once a week on Thursday evenings). Lucas overheard the conversation about Mike's failure to eat, and decided to take matters into his own hands.

Grabbing the sock full of change he kept in his underwear drawer, he grabbed his nearest cousin, who happened to be Margo, and called

out he was taking her and going to show her Hawkins. Once confirmation came from a random adult voice, Lucas threw open the door and yanked his cousin out after him.

“What am I doing here with you,” Margo asked, her slouched body language protesting the idea of hanging around Lucas’ friends. “You know they’re airing that new show I wanted to watch tonight!”

“I brought you because Mike has an older sister you can hang around with while I talk to him. Besides, she might tell you where to go out for fun,” Lucas tempted, and he saw her eyes flash with interest. Margo was never one to turn down a party invitation, and any opportunity for her to meet new people was an immediate yes from her. Lucas knew that about his social butterfly of a cousin, and also knowing that Nancy was dating one of the most popular party boys in Hawkins meant she knew exactly where Margo wanted to be tonight.

“What a lovely girl she must be, and you want me to spend some time with her?” Margo’s smile was reminiscent of a crocodile. She launched herself up the three front steps and knocked urgently on the front door, until Mike came and threw the door open with a grumbling, “What?!”

“Mike I presume? Where’s your sister, I’m Margo,” she grinned, offering a hand to shake. Mike furrowed his face and looked around her to see Lucas stand beaming, holding a box of Eggo waffles and Pop Rocks, not only his favorite candy but their lost friend’s favorite food. Mike gave a defeated smile to Lucas and showed them into his house.

“NANCY!” Mike screamed loudly up the stairs, so Nancy came flying down the stairs. Mike was so loud that his mother, who was snoring on the couch, bolted upright and shook herself awake.

“Mike, honey, why the yelling,” she mumbled, rubbing at her eye and straightening herself out when she saw Lucas and Margo standing in the front hallway. Mrs. Wheeler wasn’t used to guests seeing her in such a state of dishevelment.

“Oh, hello Lucas. I-is this your family that’s visiting?”

"Hey Mrs. Wheeler, this is Margo, she's my cousin," Lucas gestured to Margo, who waved and greeted, "How do you do?"

"Jesus Christ Mike, what do you want," Nancy snapped, and her mother retorted, "Language!"

"This is Margo, she wanted to meet you," Mike pushed Margo up the stairs so she bumped into Mike's sister, and tugged Lucas towards the kitchen, while quickly saying in a raised voice, "Mom you can go back to sleep!"

"Well it's really nice to meet you, Nancy right?" Margo giggled, and shook Nancy's hand. Mrs. Wheeler smiled at the girls, and laid back down on the couch to rest again.

"Yeah, nice to meet you too," Nancy smiled shyly and jogged up the stairs, turning to look down to Margo. "Follow me."

While Margo got comfortable upstairs, the boys were busy cooking toaster waffles and eating the explosive candy by the packet. Mike built a stack of five waffles, complete with syrup and butter and even a little whipped cream, and devoured the whole thing while Lucas shoved handfuls of rocks in his mouth and laughed as they bounced around his mouth. The two were joking around, and Lucas felt confident in his plan to make his best friend feel better.

Mike attempted to say something through a mouth full of waffle, but it came out so garbled and twisted, he wasn't even sure what he tried to say.

"Whut's et lwitk wif yur cathins?"

"Wut?" Lucas asked, his tongue hanging out of his mouth so he wouldn't drool all over the table.

Mike swallowed and repeated, "What's it like with your cousins? Is it as bad as you thought it was gonna be?"

Lucas nodded, and held up his hand so he could finish off the remnants of the pop rocks.

"They're even worse. Like evil on a new level. I mean, Junior isn't

bad, Lijah can be a pain, but Mac and Gela are like, a new level level of crazy.”

Mike whistled, and then asked, “What about Margo, she seemed...nice?”

“She's alright, I guess. She's so different from the way she used to be. I don't really know, I guess she's better now.”

“She has really light skin, are you sure you're related,” Mike scrunched in his eyebrows, and Lucas felt a pang of embarrassment, then fell silent. Mike realized he touched a nerve when he saw his friend's flushing cheeks and tried his best to take back his words.

“Oh, well I mean, like, ah, you have really similar, uh, noses...oh, and your eyes are the exact same,” Mike could feel himself getting red and began stammering over his words, while Lucas looked over at him and started to smile at his friend's lack of decorum (a word taught to him by Gela v. Margo round five this morning).

“Yeah, I get that a lot. It's not a good feeling when everyone doubts you're actually related,” Lucas huffed.

“I bet it sucks.”

“Yeah...”

There was a bit of an awkward silence between the two, as Mike fidgeted in his seat and Lucas stared down into his lap, until Mike finally piped up.

“Thanks for coming over. I needed something like this.”

Lucas held up the box of Eggos, and asked, “This was exactly what you needed, right?”

Mike nodded, and looked sadly at the box, obviously thinking about El.

“I miss her like crazy, Lucas. Seriously, this bites.”

“I know, Mike. But you know she's gotta be missing you too,” Lucas

comforted his friend, and Mike smiled weakly. He couldn't stop thinking about her, and everyday was devoted to trying to find anything that would help him find Eleven. Sometimes he would have dreams about finding her or bringing her home, and each dream would leave him even more heartbroken than the last one. At this point, after months and months of waiting and praying and hoping, Mike was completely over the idea of her being safe and sound, or even having what she needs wherever she was. He just wanted her home.

"I kissed her y'know. When you and Dustin were getting pudding I was talking to her and..." Mike confessed, and Lucas stared for a few seconds before he laughed out loud and began punching Mike in excitement.

"You son of a *bitch*! I knew you had-" Lucas started yelling, and Mike shushed him, remembering his mother sleeping in the other room.

"Shit, my bad," Lucas whispered, but still laughed and shook his friend's shoulders. "I *knew* Katie Wilson wasn't your first kiss. You're insane Wheeler, you really are."

Katie Wilson had been Mike's second kiss, during a New Year's party for the whole class. That party was the most exciting thing any of the boys had ever been to in their lives, and the location of most of their first kisses. Lucas had set an unprecedented record of 6 separate kisses from different people (he ended up landing on Mike during spin the bottle but another girl from class volunteered to take his place), while Will spent almost the whole night curled up with Jennifer Hayes. Dustin ended up not getting kissed, but he left happy and with three containers of dessert.

"Not really. Eleven was different, I guess. Katie's just Katie. But El...I guess she just means more to me," Mike tried to explain, and Lucas snorted.

"I always knew you were in *loooooove* with her," He began to imitate Mike, widening his eyes and making declarations of love about Eleven while Mike sat laughing and telling him off.

After a while, Mike looked at his watch and grabbed Lucas, pulling

him towards the basement.

"You're not gonna believe me when I tell you this, but guess what my dad bought for the basement," he grinned, and Lucas raised his eyebrows.

"No way, he didn't finally..." Lucas started, and his eyes widened in excitement. The two boys raced down the stairs and saw a new TV sitting in the corner, along with an Atari gaming system and a VHS player, all connected and ready to play. Lucas was floored and Mike was nearly bouncing off the wall.

"He won this raffle thing at his work and because we spend so much time down here anyway, he let us set one up down here. Isn't it awesome," he sighed, and Lucas wrapped his arm around his friend and grabbed Mike's shoulder. The two boys exchanged a smile, and started talking smack to one another about having a game tournament. As the console was set up by Mike, Lucas began to create a comfortable seating arrangement with pillows and blankets, and smiled to himself about successfully bringing life back into Mike.

"So, what's it like on the East Coast," Nancy asked Margo, as she sat cross-legged on her bed while the curly haired redhead leaned back in Nancy's desk chair "Are the boys really as wild as you'd think?"

"That and then some," Margo chuckled, idly twirling a piece of hair between her fingers. The Human League's "Don't You Want Me" was floating through the air and Margo was tapping her foot along to the rhythm. Nancy had never heard The Human League and Margo demanded that she take a listen to the mixtape she had made for the summertime. Of course, it had only been finalized this morning and she'd accidentally brought her the tape as it was in the pocket of her windbreaker, but now it was playing over the shy girl's stereo system.

"But it really does depend where you go. Maryland's got every damn type of party from a hoedown to a rager. Best place to go is no doubt Ocean City, they don't card you," Margo explained while Nancy stared wide eyed.

Margo was an alien according to Nancy, and looked nothing like anyone she had ever seen. In fact, she was the complete opposite of

the other girl; with electric hair, a low cut black body suit tucked into stone-washed high-waisted shorts, covered by a red, black and white windbreaker and paired with tube socks and Adidas superstars, brown smokey eyeshadow, and bright red eyeliner, Nancy felt absolutely plain and faded compared to Margo.

Margo in turn was also studying Nancy while they talked. She was quite petite and beautiful, plus her absolutely piercing features made her even more so, like her lovely wide eyes and picturesque freckles. But the conservative pastel outfit she wore, a short sleeved pink shirt, plain dark jeans, and a pair of frilly white socks, was almost like a deflector, hiding her potential from everyone. Her shiny brown hair was pulled up and away from her face and tucked into a bun, with a few of her long bangs falling onto her face.

Margo scanned around the room and landed on a photo strip on her bulletin board of Nancy and another girl. The other girl was built a little curvy, with short hair and wired glasses, and Margo could tell this picture had sentiment in Nancy's eyes.

"This your best friend?" Margo gestured to the picture and Nancy's smile immediately wavered. She recovered but the smile she wore was more stressed and hiding something quite painful.

"That's Barb. She died last winter," Nancy answered quietly, and Margo echoed in sympathy, "Sorry for your loss. I lost a friend too, drug overdose."

"Drugs? Jesus, that's awful," Nancy tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear and Margo hummed in agreement. She looked over at Nancy and started talking while she watched Nancy's body language.

"Yeah, nobody knew till it was too late. He didn't deserve what happened. Was one of those kids who everyone thought was going to Harvard or Yale or some place like that. That's why even though I party like a monster, I don't take drugs. It's not my style," she admitted. Nancy nodded and began to fiddle with the charm on her necklace, avoiding eye contact with her new acquaintance. All of a sudden, there was a knock at her window and Margo exclaimed, "*Holy shit!*" and nearly fell out of her chair.

"Who the hell is that?" She asked Nancy, who was laughing and clapping her hands.

"It's just Steve, that's my boyfriend," she told Margo, and hopped up from her bed to open the window for her sweetheart.

Nancy wasn't the kind of the girl Margo saw having a boyfriend like Steve. Steve was everything a stereotypical jock aspired to be; tall, attractive and friendly looking enough so suspicion wouldn't be aroused if he was pulled over by a cop. Nancy was quiet, very studious and smart according to the types of worksheets scattered across her desk, not the type of girl you'd expect to party with a jock.

"Hey," Steve greeted his girlfriend with a quick kiss to her cheek and stared down at Margo as she was pulling herself off the floor.

"Uh, who's your friend?"

"This is Margo. She's in town visiting family for the summer," Nancy introduced her to Steve, who held his hand out for Margo to shake.

"How do you do, Steve? Now I have to ask, do you always come climbing through people's windows instead of knocking on their doors," Margo joked, and Steve chuckled.

"Nah, but I like to use the window when I wanna talk to Nancy here about more, ah, *sensitive* issues. Such as the party happening at James' tonight that if I passed history you promised you would go to with me and since report cards have finally come," Steve dramatically pulled a small printed piece of paper out of his back pocket and shook open to show Nancy, who was watching her boyfriend's theatrics with a hint of amusement.

"If you would so kindly direct your attention to this grade right here, it says that I, Steve Harrington, received a B minus in the class of World History Honors, which means," Steve was grinning widely as Nancy rolled her eyes and groaned.

"You've got to be kidding. No way, not happening," she began to dismiss Steve's excited dancing and singing, "*We're going to the party, you promised me.*"

Margo had begun to listen to Steve as soon as he mentioned a party and decided to employ a few of her older sibling's persuasive tricks in order to get Nancy on her side.

"Well I don't know Nancy, if you promised Steve and he delivered said results, I do believe that means you have to go to this little shindig," Margo began to move closer to the couple and started to get a bit sly.

"Now, no offense to you Steve, but I don't think Hawkins could produce a party that's very intense. What if, and I'm just spit balling ideas here, we made a night out of this? You come over to where I'm staying, we get ready, Steve picks us up, we can go get a bite to eat, maybe some shakes, then we go to this party for maybe like an hour, maybe even two if you decide you're having fun, and we have a sleepover when we get back at my house?"

Margo's offer was so tempting, Nancy was having trouble resisting. There were cracks in her facade when Margo mentioned getting ready together, going for food and especially the sleepover. The idea of spending the whole night eating, giggling over gossip magazines and doing various and ridiculous beauty tricks on one another was the definition of heavenly in Nancy's eyes. Nancy loved sleepovers. When the strange new girl and her pathetically adorable boyfriend began to pout their lips and beg with big puppy eyes, whining and pleading, she threw her hands up in defeat and sighed, "Fine, you win."

Steve cheered and gave Nancy a huge kiss on her forehead while squeezing her in a hug. Margo pumped her fists a few time and hooked her arm around Nancy.

"This is gonna be so wicked, you're not gonna regret this Nancy!"

"Hey," Steve clapped his hands as if he had just had a great idea, "we'll even invite Jonathan. While Margo and I socialize you can hang out with him and relax!"

Nancy rolled her eyes while she smiled, because that was originally going to be a request of hers. Jonathan despised parties more than Nancy did, but having one another as brooding company was good

enough for her.

“Fine, I’ll call him and ask.”

Steve apparently had to return to work, so he gave Nancy a quick and sweet kiss, before clambering back out the window. She watched him scramble down to the front lawn, and waved at him when he turned around to look at her once more. He blew a quick kiss and ran towards his car.

“He’s quite a looker,” Margo remarked, peering at him over Nancy’s shoulder. Nancy hummed and walked herself over to the closet and started looking through, trying to find herself an outfit for the party.

“Please don’t tell me you’re looking for party outfits in that pastel tomb,” Margo snorted, and Nancy turned around, pretending to be hurt by her comments as she pressed a hand to her chest and gasped overdramatically.

“I happen to think my style is wonderful, thank you very much.”

“Yeah it’s wonderful for an eleven year old girl but you are what, 16? You’re getting styled by me tonight, sorry no exceptions.”

Nancy packed a small bag with everything she needed for a sleepover, and Margo popped her tape out of the stereo.

The two girls ran down the stairs laughing and joking around, just as Mrs. Wheeler was walking past the front door.

“Ooh, Mom!” Her mother turned around and looked stunned by the huge grins on the two’s faces. “Margo asked me to go sleepover at her house tonight and Steve wants to take us out to celebrate Margo coming to town. Is it okay, please say it’s okay,” Nancy pleaded, clasping her hands together and begging.

“Well that’s absolutely fine, be in no later than 11, you know curfew. You’re at the Sinclairs, right...” Mrs. Wheeler searched her memory for her daughter’s new friend’s name, and Nancy filled in for her, “Margo.”

“Ah, yes Margo.”

“Yes mamn, I’m Lucas’ cousin,” Margo held her hand out and gave Mrs. Wheeler a friendly handshake.

“Welcome to Hawkins, dear. You two keep out of trouble tonight,” She called out after them as they ran out the door.

Notes for the Chapter:

wow okay this got a lot more popular than I ever thought it would

thank you all of your from the bottom of my heart and i wish everyone who started school this week the best of luck (i fortunately do not start until next monday, so i'll have plenty of time to maybe write a few chapters before the school year starts).

EDIT: well well, 2021 has allowed me time to revisit this fic, hi y'all

i realized palpatine was uhgg not a thing in the 80's that's my b. also i was 16 or 17 when i wrote this and i'm currently on my way to turning 21 in a few months. damn how time flies.

4. Chapter Four: Knight Life in Hawkins

TRIGGER WARNING -- strong language towards the end of the chapter. that is all.

June 8th, 1984

"Hold still," Margo insisted, and leaned in close to begin dragging the cobalt blue liner across Nancy's eyelid. Nancy sat nearly motionless, eyes shut softly, trying not to ruin all of her new friend's handy work.

When the two had arrived at the house, Gela had thrown herself into the mix and declared that she would style Nancy's hair while Margo picked her outfit and did her makeup. Halfway through the process, the girl's mother had come into the room, shouting about something smelling like burning hair. Nancy, who had never done anything fancy to her hair besides the occasional curl, looked utterly terrified at the prospect of her hair being burnt.

"Oh, that's why," Daisy laughed and clasped Nancy's hands between her own. "Nice to meet you darling. I'm these two's mother, but please call me Ms. Daisy."

"Momma this is Nancy from down the street. She's taking me out tonight," Margo looked to her mother who *ooh*-ed in response.

"See how come Gogo can go out but I can't?" Gela complained, and Ms. Daisy's expression darkened immediately.

"Because Gogo didn't climb out the window and nearly scare me to death so she could sneak out for some boy the day before we left," She snapped, and Margo snickered as her sister flushed crimson. Nancy giggled too, and Ms. Daisy began to fiddle with the stereo player in the corner of the room. Finally, the opening chords to "My Girl" drifted through the room. Gela whooped loud and began to sing with a comb in her hand. Daisy sang along in harmony while Nancy looked utterly fascinated with the whole scene. She couldn't imagine any teenager in town ever acting like this, especially with their

families. But here stood two girls, one nearly old enough to live alone, dancing along to music older than themselves with their mother. They were so foreign and so enchanting, like the sirens they read about in English. Nancy couldn't help but wonder if like those sirens, they had some sort of dark secret that was only revealed when you were too close.

"Hey," Margo's voice snapped Nancy back to reality, her face close enough to Nancy's own she could smell the watermelon gum in her mouth.

"You're all done, wanna see?" A small hand held mirror was placed on her lap, and she picked it up to show a stranger.

"Holy...wow!"

Nancy's eyes were covered by a light pink shimmer, with slightly different shades blended together softly, topped with a flicked electric blue wing. Under her eyes was a hot pink shadow, making her blue eyes shine. Her lashes were long and defined, cheeks a sweet natural flush and her lips painted a bright pink. Her hair was curled and voluminous, pinned and swept to her right side so they wouldn't hide Gela's awesome looking silver hoops.

Nancy was stunned. She looked from left to right back and forth speechless, with a wide smile plastered to her face. Daisy laughed and teased gently at the girl's reaction.

"That Steve boy's reaction's gonna be exactly the same way, be prepared for it."

"Margo, this is amazing, I don't even know," Nancy stumbled over her words but Margo held her hand up silencing the other girl.

"Say nothing, it was my pleasure. Now as much as a fabulous makeup can change a perspective, the outfit helps too." At this point, Margo yanked out a bundle of folded clothes and directed Nancy to the bathroom attached to the guest room.

"Get changed, hurry hurry. Steve's coming to get us in a few and I wanna make sure we're put together before we get outta here."

Nancy shut the door to the bathroom and looked in the mirror at herself. As much as her reflection mimicked her bone structure, her blue eyes and her petite frame, it was looking at a new version of herself. The new version was colorful, stylish and the kind of person Carol would want to hang out with.

The outfit she was borrowing from Margo was something straight out of TeenVogue. A plain white t shirt that was cut short, black shiny leggings, a big denim jacket with little buttons and pins attached all over, and Nancy had opted to wear her plain black sneakers instead of the neon pink pumps Margo recommend. Those and the ballet slipper necklace she always wore were little remnants of a different girl, a shy and intelligent scholar who didn't get out much. That girl had gone away for the night, and instead Nancy was opting for someone more...*wild*.

Stepping out of the bathroom and striking a dramatic pose, Margo gasped and clapped her hands while Ms. Daisy and Gela fawned over the girl from Hawkins. Margo was dressed like a city punk, a cropped red tank top and destroyed jeans with her Adidas' and a red bandana tied around as a headband.

"You both look lovely, but you're both due back here no later than midnight. I will hunt y'all down if ya late," Margo's mother reminded the girls and gave them each a sweet kiss on the cheek.

Margo held her hand out for Nancy to take, and once she had grabbed it the two girl waltzed out into the hallway and raced down the stairs to the front door, briefing saying goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair on the couch of the sitting room.

"Nancy, is Lucas at your house with Mike," Mr. Sinclair asked, and Nancy giggled, "Yes. Have a lovely night!"

The two girl flew out across the lawn, where Steve and Jonathan stood laughing in front of Steve's car. Once Jonathan caught sight of the two, he began tapping Steve on the shoulder until he turned around and stared amazed by the transformed Nancy.

"Damn, you look..." Steve trailed off, his jaw practically on the pavement, while his girlfriend smiled and twirled in a circle like she

was a princess at a ball.

"Yeah, I'm impressed. You look like a neon street sign, Nancy," Jonathan joked, and Nancy smacked him playfully. Margo hid behind her new friend, fiddling with a ring on her finger until Nancy suddenly remembered the girl who made it all possible standing behind her.

"Oh! May I present to you, my newest friend, Margo Sinclair of Baltimore," she introduced, and Margo curtsied with a mysterious smile while studying Jonathan, who returned her gaze with a hint of amusement.

"Jonathan Byers, of Hawkins," Jonathan teased, holding his hand out for the stranger, who took it lightly and let him pull her upright.

"How do you do," Margo greeted coyly. Nancy smiled at the both of them, who seemed to be absolutely fascinated with one another.

"Well then you two, should we be off?" Steve wrapped his arm around Nancy's waist, and opened the door of the back seat, and Jonathan's eyes never left Margo as they both slid into the back seat of the car.

"I do believe we've found a friend for Jonathan, Nancy Wheeler," Steve joked, before pulling Nancy in close and whispering, "you look absolutely beautiful Nance."

"You're an idiot Steve Harrington," Nancy smiled softly, and leaned in to give her boyfriend a sweet kiss. He opened up the passenger door up for his girl, before helping her into his car.

Meanwhile at Mike's house, the two boys were vegging out in front of the new TV set in the basement. The boys had begged Mrs. Wheeler to get a pizza, and in a surprising twist of events she had actually agreed to it. They had also trekked down to the library per Mike's request and rented all three Star Wars tapes to marathon that night.

The Empire Strikes Back was halfway through, when there was a loud banging on the back door. It startled Mike so much he flung the bowl of popcorn in his lap across the room, spilling it everywhere.

“Who in the hell?” Lucas asked skeptically, and the door was flung open by Will, who was panting and covered in mud and leaves, with a large bruise on the side of his face.

“Whoa, Byers! What the hell man, who did that,” Mike asked and Will braced himself against the doorframe.

“Lonnie...Lonnie got drunk and...we got into a fight so I ran and got myself onto a bus until...got to bus station and there were cops, I ran to...to the woods, I was hiding,” he swallowed and looked up at his friends terrified. “I saw her. She's out there.”

“Who's out there?” Lucas asked, pushing himself off the floor and rushing over to the door to help the younger boy into the basement and sit down.

Will was shaking and had tears on his cheeks. Lucas grabbed a blanket and wrapped it around him, pausing the movie and kneeling down to so he could look Will in the eyes.

“Will who did you see in the woods?”

Will was so quiet they could barely hear him, but he whispered, “Eleven.”

Lucas' eyes widened and snapped up to look at Mike, who's hands had begun to tremble and started to breathe fast.

“Are you sure? You're absolutely certain this was Eleven?”

“I recognized her voice. She grabbed me and said Seven was close. Then she took off running,” Will stammered, and Mike grabbed the backpack he kept in the blanket fort, slinging it over his shoulder. It had everything they would need for a rescue mission; ponchos, an extra walkie talkie, the hunting knife Lucas' dad used in Vietnam, the wrist rocket and a small plastic bag full of rocks to be used for ammo, and multiple flashlights. He looked at the two boys and gestured for them to follow him.

“What are we waiting for, let's go get El-” he turned for the door and Lucas grabbed his arm.

"Hold on for a minute, Wheeler. Look at Will for a second," they both turned to look down at Will, who was clutching the blanket tightly around him. He was clearly petrified. Lucas approached his friend slowly and put a hand on his shoulder in comfort.

"Will, did something else happen in the woods," Lucas calmly questioned, and the other boy nodded visibly shaken.

"What happened?"

"Eleven was there...she had something on her. It was wrapping around her leg and it looked like a black vine. And she wasn't alone."

"What do you mean she wasn't alone? Like, another person was with her," Mike asked confused, and Will shook his head.

"No, she was being held by something underground. The vine on her leg was coming out of the dirt."

Mike immediately grabbed Lucas and pulled him towards the door, shouting, "We have to go get her now, she's in danger!"

"Mike calm down, we need to take care of Will before we go chasing after El. What if it was like a mirage, like she's still wherever she is and she's just projecting an image back to here," Lucas tried to reason with his friend but Mike wasn't having it.

"Screw that! El needs us right now let's go!"

"Mike, think for a second would you? You're not making any sense--"

"*Enough!*" Will had stood up and was staring at the two quarreling by the door. The shaking had stopped and he looked enraged by their arguments.

"Right now, El needs our help. I know what those vines mean and it's not a good sign if she's got one wrapped around her leg. She may be able to fight but not much longer. We have to go now," he explained and grabbed an extra flashlight by the TV.

"My bike's out front, wanna ride with me," Lucas asked and Will nodded. Mike stared out the open door.

El, if you can hear me, he thought, we're coming to get you. Hang on.

It was silent for a few seconds, until a whisper creeped into his ears that he knew he only could hear.

Hurry.

Steve and Nancy were sitting on one side of the diner booth while Jonathan sat on the other. Margo had gone up to the register to talk to the waitress, who apparently knew her mother and wanted to catch up on all the things the waitress missed when she'd moved away.

"So, Jonathan," Steve started, and Jonathan's gaze on Margo never faltered as he made a hum to gesture he was listening.

"Having fun oogling Miss Sinclair?" There was a teasing tone in his voice, and Jonathan turned his head back to glare at Steve, and then Nancy who was smiling coyly at her friend.

"I'm-I'm not oogling. She's just...fascinating I guess," Jonathan blushed slightly and Steve began to coo and tease the other guy, prompting Jonathan to throw an ice cube at him.

Margo returned to the table and slid in next to Jonathan.

"Damn, y'all have to be the friendliest townsfolk ever to the point of it being strange. I have to admit, kinda makes me feel like you're all hiding a big town secret never to be told," she exclaimed, and Jonathan exchanged a nervous smile with the couple sitting across the booth.

They hadn't told anyone about what happened the night Will came back. It bonded the three of them in a way that trauma often does; connecting those involved through the experience and the way it changed them. Steve would never admit it, but he still had nightmares about the monster in the hallway of Jonathan's house, and it often kept him wide awake at night. Jonathan has developed ticks and twitches, like his insistence on rapping his knuckles in four four time during every class or organizing and rearranging the

magnets on Mr. Gangs', the photography teacher, whiteboard. Nancy never used to shield herself away from other people's advances or their friendliness, but now it was like Fort Knox trying to talk to her. Her guard never came down unless she was with Jonathan and Steve, because she knew no matter what they would face, they would keep each other safe.

"Strange? Hawkins is strange? Aren't you from Baltimore," Jonathan scrunched his eyebrows and Margo held her hand out and displayed an expression of "what do you mean?"

The two began to squabble and lightly hit each other, as Nancy tried to keep her composure while laughing. Steve turned his head towards the door and groaned in anguish.

"You've gotta be kidding me," he moaned, and Nancy whipped her head around to see Tommy H. standing in , arm twisted around Carol's waist while she blew a large bubble in her gum. Nancy groaned under her breath in exasperation while summoned Jonathan to look up toward the entrance.

"Jesus Christ," Jonathan mumbled and looked away from the couple, trying to hide his face and fix his hair, obviously weary of the two at the door. Margo looked around confused and whispered to the boy next to her.

"Who's the bougei looking hon at the door," she asked, and Steve leaned close and replied. "Her name is Carol, queen bee, such a bitch. Her boyfriend is that guy, Tommy? He's *the* guy to party with, but he's also pretty stupid. They're our school's power couple," he explained, and Margo stared in disgust.

"He ain't even that cute."

Jonathan couldn't help it; he burst out laughing from the utter disgust in Margo's voice. That fatal mistake led Tommy H. to turn to look at the table of the friends.

He smirked and stalked over with Carol, smacking his jaw. Jonathan began to tap his knuckles in fear, until Margo slipped her hand on to the table and grabbed it. He looked over with wide eyes and she

smiled gently, mouthing, "Don't worry."

"Well well. Let's see who you've got hanging out here Stevie Wonder," Tommy began, and Steve glared up at his former acquaintance.

"We're just here to enjoy ourselves, Tommy. Leave us alone, please."

"Hey now, take it easy killer. I just wanted to say hello to Little Miss Prissy," he scoffed down at Nancy, who was looking down at the table avoiding his eyes. "And the pervert," Tommy continued and spat at Jonathan, who blushed and began to shift in his seat, then turned his attention to Margo.

"Oh look, Steve went out and made a new little friend. They have a new addition, Carol! What's your name, Bozo?"

Margo rolled her eyes, as if the name was nothing new, and turned her attention to the jock standing in front of her.

"Wow, Bozo? That's all you got," she smirked and glanced at him up and down. A few of the other teenage patrons had come over and huddled around the table, anticipating the drama from the stranger. No one had ever stood up to Tommy H. and Carol and not been screwed over, so her feisty nature in response was quite peculiar.

"From someone who appears to have something beneficial to society, opening your mouth proves that looks ain't everything, are they Tommy dearest?"

Nancy who was taking a sip of her drink choked and the two boys sitting down started cracking up, as Tommy stood dumbfounded and Carol scoffed. A few in the crowd *ooh*-ed and someone slapped Margo on the shoulder.

"And what are you, a priss in whore's clothing," Carol fired back, getting another round of oh's from the crowd. Margo looked her up and down then scrunched her eyebrows in disgust.

"Speak for yourself, sweet cheeks. Tell me, what's better, acting like a tough girl in front of me or acting like you're coming for your boy toy," Margo replied coolly, and Nancy clapped a hand to her mouth

in shock. The spectators roared and started laughing. No one had ever said anything so undermining to Carol's face before, and she was absolutely fuming.

"You're the one who's holding onto Jeepers Creeper in the corner. Are you into peeping toms?"

"I don't know, are you into hypermasculine chlamydia factories? You think you're such a hot commodity but if I bought you for what I think you're worth and sold you for what you think you're worth, I'd be richer than Sam R Walton."

Carol gasped, and everyone screamed in response. Margo left no stone unturned as she continued to pack on the couple standing before her.

"Now, you had no reason to come over here and act unfortunately disrespectful to my new friends, so I had to apply the golden rule of "treat those how you wish to be treated." However, I'll offer you a choice; apologize and we can all forget about this little vocal spat. Or continue to undermine these perfectly lovely folks," She smiled with venomous beauty, and the crowd held their breath in anticipation as Tommy clenched his jaw and fist, "and I'll rip everything you hold dearly to shreds. Your move, hot shot."

Tommy lifted up Margo's plate of food, and threw it to the floor, the enamel shattering everywhere. The audience jeered and Margo stared at Tommy's smirk and Carol's giggling face. Then, calm and silent, she rose to her feet and stood directly in front of Tommy. She was only a few inches under him, but she smiled sweetly and turned to whisper something in Carol's ear.

The smile on her face faded to a deep set frown, and tears welled up in her eyes as she turned to face her boyfriend, hand flying from her pocket to slap him across the face.

"My *cousin*??!"

She then dashed out of the diner as her loud weeping carried through loudly. Tommy turned ashen and grabbed Margo by the shirt collar and screamed, "Who the fuck are you and how do you know that?!"

Jonathan jumped from the table and pushed Tommy off of her and into the counter. He sprawled out against a stool and stared, heaving as his eyes flicked back and forth wildly.

“Show’s over Tommy. Get out,” Jonathan warned, hands steady and voice dangerously low. The jock rose and adjusted his jacket, then stormed out after Carol.

The crowd was silent for a few beats but then, a wave of screams exploded from the audience. Jonathan looked around to see the classmates who ignored him and teased him, whooping and hollering for him. Steve leapt from the booth to grab his friend by the shoulders and shake him excitedly, and began a chant.

John-ny By-ers!

John-ny By-ers!

John-ny By-ers!

Nancy sat rolling her eyes but smiling brightly as her two best friends were dancing around laughing, basking in the glow of appreciation and cheers they received. Margo was standing off to the side, grinning slyly. Jonathan locked eyes with her and returned her smile as someone in the crowd shouted about the parking lot, prompting the teens to move outside. Nancy was tugged from her seat by Steve, and another classmate began to blast music from their car in the lot, arousing another round of cheers.

Only Margo stayed. After grabbing a black tub from the counter, she began picking up the shattered plate and ruined food from the greasy floor, then throwing them into the container. Jonathan noticed her sticking behind, and he returned to her side, collecting the scraps. She

was mostly done, but then she poked the boy’s shoulder to get his attention.

“Nice moves, *Johnny*,” Margo teased, grinning and showing her tongue through her teeth. Jonathan blushed and chuckled, shrugging his shoulders.

“It was just...I’ve seen what he can do to people he doesn’t like. I’ve felt it. And I couldn’t stand the tho-”

His rambling was cut off by Margo leaning over and pressing a short kiss on his lips. Jonathan felt his chest seize and his hands dropped to the floor, while Margo placed her hand tenderly on his cheek. His eyes closed and his heart raced, but as quickly as the kiss happened it was over. The teen flashed open his eyes to look at the other in front of him, who was biting her lip and scrunching her nose in a uniquely beautiful way.

Uniquely beautiful. That was Margo. When Jonathan looked at her all he saw was quirks and oddities that blended and contrasted into a visually stunning and passionate soul.

“Why did you do that,” He deadpanned, too stunned and surprised by her confidence.

“Don't second guess yourself. You're so much stronger when you don't,” she winked, and pulled him off the floor.

“C'mon. All brave knights deserve a dance, don't you agree?”

Notes for the Chapter:

OH MY GOD I AM SO SORRY

the school year came out of nowhere and stabbed me with a textbook named Wilson. this is a long winded and over dramatic chapter. but fear not, we will return to our brave trio in 5, and yes, hopper will be coming too.

anyway, hope this makes your tuesday!!

5. Chapter Five - Vale of Shadows

CH. 5

“Eleven!”

“El!”

“El’s, it’s Mike and Lucas! We’re here to help,” Lucas yelled into the darkness of the forest. The winds were picking up and the rustling of the leaves, new from the spring, could send a chill down the bravest man’s spine. The trio of boys raced down the back roads to the place Will had run from. Chaining their bikes to the fence along the side of the road, they had clicked on their blindingly bright flashlights and began trekking into the woods. Now, after what felt like hours but could only have been a few minutes, dread and fear had begun to settle in.

“Maybe she’s escaped and gone north, or maybe she tried to run back to your house,” Will suggested, but Mike shook his head. In the shadows of the forest, his pale skin glowed and stood out proudly. Lucas thought about turning the flashlight onto his friend, as so he might turn him into a reflecting spotlight for Eleven to find.

“Will’s got a point, Mike. We have to consider the i-” Lucas tried to point out but Mike turned to his friend and snapped harshly.

“We don’t have to consider shit! I know El’s still out here, I know she’s in danger.”

“How??!” Lucas’ anger began to boil over. His fiery temper was a Sinclair family trait, passed down like some recipe book or a jacket. But Mike Wheeler and his obsession over the mystery girl from the laboratory had pushed him over the edge, and there was no stopping the avalanche of fury spilling from his lips.

“Mike, I’ve given you the benefit of the doubt for months. I’ve tried my best to be supportive, but now I’m fed up with your bull. Listen to yourself. For five minutes, think about someone else besides El!”

The last comment was a slap in the face. Mike opened and closed his mouth like a gaping fish. All the words he had planned on yelling vanished. Instead of saying them, they clung to the walls in his throat until he couldn't utter a sound without choking on his emotions. His hands began to tremble and Lucas stared at him with white hot fury in his eyes. Will's eyes flitted back and forth silently, but then his gaze drifted to the trees in front of them, eyes widening with a whimper.

"Guys," he whispered low, and Lucas turned his head to face the younger boy who was now staring into the darkness of the forest.

Because something was there.

Whether Lucas could see it or not Will couldn't tell, but his friend was now slowly reaching for the hunting knife strapped to his belt, gesturing to Mike to not move. But Mike was glued to the floor, paralyzed not by fear for his safety but fear for El, for Will, even for Lucas.

The shadows of the trees, overlapping and blending into one terrifying picture, had begun to move. Instead of standing in the shape of trees and foliage, they were hunching over and curling, twisting and deforming into monstrous shapes. The creatures were tall, wispy from the fleeting light of the moon, with long arms and claws that dragged against the bark of the trees, leaving deep, jagged scratch marks.

Kkkcccccrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr.

The sound sent a most sinister chill down the boy's spines, and the feeling sank deep into their bones when the beasts began to growl and breathe into the night, revealing rows upon rows of snagged teeth, chipped and glinting in the gaps of light scattered across the woods.

Will Byers, a hissing voice slithered into the heads of all the boys. No creature actually opened its mouth to speak words, but the voice seemingly came from the tallest shadow creature, which opened two glowing red eyes. The pupils dilated large and small as they drank in the scene before them; before finally landing on the smallest of the

boys. It's eyes narrowed and it's mouth twisted into a cruel smile.

"Will," Lucas finally breathed at last, "what...the *fuck*...are those?"

"I-I-I didn't," Will stammered, searching for the words to explain the situation.

"I didn't think they were real."

The creatures clicked their tongues and began growling and barking, stretching their arms and swaying back and forth.

Stay, stay, stay and play Will. Play with you.

The creatures began to crawl out of the shadows and extend their arms out towards the boy, their claws just barely missing his feet and his arms. One managed to drag its sharp talon across Will's cheek, creating a long red line that traveled down from his ear to the corner of his mouth.

"Will," Mike's voice raised in warning as the monsters clambered to their feet and moved towards them, and Will began to step back slowly, deliberate in his actions as Lucas and Mike copied his motions.

Will bent down to touch the ground and his hand closed around a large cold rock, which he promptly threw as hard as he could at the head of the nearest monster. The short seconds of confusion and distraction brought upon the thing allowed Will to scream a single command at the top of his lungs.

"RUN!"

The boys took off sprinting in peril as the monsters roared, a wounded and ear splitting cry that shook the branches of the oaks and dogwoods. Each boy began weaving and bounding over the fallen rotten logs on the ground, trying to evade the chilling shadows. The shadows weren't far behind, much faster than anything the trio had ever known. Their long spindly legs seemed to fly over every hole, hill and ridge as they pursued their targets.

Soon the boys came up to the street and fence where their bikes were

chained. Mike fumbled with the key to the lock as he tried to hurry. The cries and shrieks were gaining closer and closer every second, and his friends pleas to hurry weren't helping.

"Lock lock lock lock *LOCK LOCK*," Lucas' voice raised in panic and Mike responded equally scared, "I'm trying!"

Suddenly something knocked Lucas clear down the road; a shadow had thrown him and began to drag him up and down the paved concrete. Lucas was hollering and screaming for help but the thing only rumbled out a noise that seemed to be a laugh. It was enjoying this. Will was screaming for help and begging for the creatures to stop, but his cries went unanswered.

Mike called for his friend but was then snatched by the ankles and flown high into the air. Wrapping its hand tightly around Mike, struggling and gasping to breathe, the shadow began to speak in rolling, almost melodic tones while leering.

Poor little thing, so sad, so lonely. The heart is broken. Does it wish to be happy?

The eyes of the shadow shifted to a glowing icy blue, and Mike became fixed in a trance, his eyes growing dim and filling with the reflection of its light.

Look, it whispered sweetly, look and see. I will make it happy again.

"Mike."

The voice of Eleven was soft in his ear. Mike opened his eyes to see her standing there, looking up at him in the mysterious, yet beautiful stare she always held with him.

Her hair was longer, barely brushing the tops of her thin shoulders, yet still short enough so it wouldn't pull away from her face. Now, her lovely dark brown curls grew in shy twisting S-coiled patterns. A pink flower held some of her hair away from her face. She was dressed like a princess, in a steely blue dress, the soft material sparkling and dancing around her in an aura of beauty under the

light.

Mike only then realized they were standing in the middle school's gym, completely alone. The tacky decorations of the Snow Ball littered the walls and a slow sappy romance song echoed and rang off the walls. Mike was wearing his church suit, a stuffy black jacket and too-tight black tie with his white dress shirt. But at the moment, nothing about it was uncomfortable. In fact, it felt like nothing he had ever worn before.

"Snow Ball, I promised. Remember," El whispered shyly, a slight flush raising to her cheeks. Mike didn't get a chance to respond until El grabbed his hand and rested it against her waist, her other hand sliding down Mike's arm, resting by his side, to weave their fingers together. Mike's voice caught in his throat, a pathetic noise mimicking a busted squeaker toy. There was music but no evidence of a stereo. The two, now comfortably wrapped up in each other's arms, swayed back and forth to the melody.

"I missed you a lot," Mike mumbled, and El smiled softly and rested her head on his shoulder. They moved in silence, both trying to cling to every single detail and sensation they felt in these moments. El finally stopped, pulling away to look Mike in the eyes.

"Do you want to stay like this?"

"What?" Mike asked, and El giggled and then repeated her question.

"Do you, want to stay here," She asked slowly, lips curling into a delicate and soft smile.

"We could keep dancing, and nothing would change. I feel happy here, I feel happy with you. Stay, feel happy with me."

Wrong, whispered a small voice in Mike's head.

Everything about El was so creepily incorrect and fake, Mike couldn't focus on any of her words. Instead of her usual patchy sentences, her speech flowed like music. Her scars and bumps and bruises had completely healed and vanished, and the tattooed 011 was gone. She looked sweet and normal, beautiful and warm.

This wasn't El. Eleven was strong, her speech and manners coarse and outlandish. The wall that protected her emotions wasn't present. Eleven had cuts and bruises, her hands were dirty and her hair buzzed. The girl who stood in front of Mike didn't act like a wounded animal when you reached out to comfort her, she welcomed the touch.

"El," Mike started, stumbling over his words when Eleven smiled at him with nothing but pure love in her eyes.

"You're not real. This isn't real."

At first, nothing changed except for El's expression, dropping to a hurt smile. Mike was about to apologize until the air of the middle school's gym changed. The music faded away, and a low humming, like stereo static, rippled through the air. Suddenly, large cracks spiderwebbed the walls and ceiling, a faint bluish light slipping through the gaps and illuminating Mike and Eleven. The hum got louder and the light got brighter, Mike eventually shielding his eyes and wincing from the shrieking ring in his ears.

And with that, the gym *exploded*.

Every solid object around them began shattering into pieces. The ceiling opened up and everything, from the silver and white streamers to the floorboards, was sucked up into the air as if a tornado was tearing through Hawkins. El's body began to unwind and blur, vanishing into thin air.

Mike's clothes reverted to the ripped up jeans, red striped navy t-shirt and Converse he was wearing earlier that day. He wasn't standing on solid ground anymore, he was floating. The whine in Mike's ear began to distort and strobe, taking on the form of words. Not words, a name. His name.

MIKE!

Mike felt his head snap to look up toward the source of blinding light, which was slowly growing even brighter than before. His eyes felt like they were burning, but he couldn't look away. He couldn't even blink. The call of his name was growing louder and clearer,

taking on a familiar voice.

“Nancy?” Mike yelled, certain his older sister was here, that she was going to save him again. A nauseating force washed over him and he thought he was going to pass out again. The feeling was overwhelming and sharp, stabbing him with red hot spears of pain all over his body. All Mike could think was, *This is what it must feel like to be a pincushion.*

MIKE, WAKE UP MIKE!

Suddenly, something reached up and pulled Mike’s face down to look at it. The light had stolen the boy’s vision, but it was strong enough to identify that it was kind of a face. Inhuman and warping, with shining skin and no features. Silver skin (was it skin? It could’ve just as easily been a costumed mask.) with a black hole in the center, which Mike assumed was a mouth.

Michael Wheeler, I will have you. If it’s the last thing I do, the thing purred in his ear, which set the hair on Mike’s body standing straight to attention. It was lilting and soft, dripping so much sweetness it was more like poison.

And just as soon as it was there, it was gone.

The light was now blocking out all of Mike’s vision, so bright Mike screamed from pain. His body was on fire, his brain felt like it was melting and being shoved in a blender all at once. His senses went into overload. With consciousness slipping away, he held on with all his might for a brief second, long enough to hear Nancy’s voice one more time.

Mike. Come back.

Notes for the Chapter:

OH MY GOD THIS IS SO OVERDUE I AM V SORRY
BUT I WAS PUTTING A LOT OF THOUGHT AND
EFFORT INTO THIS

anywhoooooo i hope your day was alright and this is
a little spot of happy for your week. we're almost at

friday yAGA we got dis

the new monsters in this really came from my own elementary school fear of the dark. no joke i slept with my closet light on for 10.5 years and i still keep it on some nights.

also, if you've ever seen the princess and the frog movie from disney? the shadow man's monsters? do you see where i'm going with this? the only difference is my monsters are intent on torturing children and whatnot.

it's been a weird day i just failed two tests back to back but i needed to get this done. not just for me, but for the people who need to read this.

6. Chapter Six - The Reveal

Notes for the Chapter:

I AM SO SORRY

okay so no excuses, i didn't do what i needed to and that's bad. my bad y'all

@smiley101 this is for you

WARNING: brief explicit sexual statements and such, but nothing WILD

CH. 6

James' house looked like a scene out of a movie. Toilet paper streamed from the front yard trees and trash littered the front lawn. A couple sat making out under one particularly decorated tree, only a few feet away from a half naked teenage boy, passed out with a bottle of vodka curled to his chest. Music blared from every open window and door, the bass pumping and pulsing, giving the party a heartbeat you could feel before you even stepped foot into it.

"This is gonna be interesting isn't it," Margo scoffed, and Jonathan whistled. He'd been to a few parties in the past, but nothing quite on this scale. James wasn't the kind to throw parties, but after successfully achieving an early admissions letter to Brown, he decided to throw caution to the wind and invite every senior from Hawkins to New Salem for a blowout bash.

James Holliday was a member of one of the wealthiest families in Indiana, but he never ever flaunted his wealth. Unlike Steve, who drove a new car and wore his Michael Kors watch everyday, James bought a second hand Plymouth Barracuda with money he had earned from his three jobs (rather than flaunting his money, he flaunted his work ethic) and his watch, while being a Rolex, had been purchased from a consignment shop in Chicago. All of his clothes were bought in the second hand store downtown, his shoes never looked fresh out of the box.

He was humbled and quiet, and managed to stay under the radar for two years, until the day his father came to pick him up in a cherry red 1960 Ferrari, wearing a tailored pinstripe Dior suit. From that day forward, James was catapulted into the popular crowd and people clambered to be his best friend.

Steve knew James well because they both had attended the same private elementary school in the city, and both understood that money got you two things; it got you places and got you in and out of trouble. James was also a great friend to Jonathan. After ending up randomly assigned as partners during a project in their freshman year photography course, they clicked right away. The project was based on family life, and each boy had taken stunning photos of their mothers. From that point on, their collaborations, whether in photography or any other subject, were always revered by their teachers. On top of that, they'd grown very close with one another

James was standing by the front door, taking long slow drags from a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. He looked up when he heard approaching footsteps, his face splitting into a wide grin. Immediately he pushed himself upright and stooped low, holding his arm out like a waiter in a fancy restaurant.

“Sir *Steven Harrington*, how might you be, my good man,” he waved his hand while greeting his friend with a thick British accent, recalling a fairly old inside joke between the two boys.

Steve laughed and molded his face so his lips dropped and puckered into a soured expression, mocking the appearance of a distinguished foreign politician.

“Oh *do forgive me*, Sir James Holliday,” Steve responded, bowing dramatically, “I did believe there was a small get together being held in this residence, hmm?”

Nancy began to snort as James and Steve circled each other, each accented phrase more ridiculous and pompous than the last. Jonathan stared bewildered and Margo reached down into her bag to pull up an unopened carton of Newport cigarettes.

After a few entertaining exchanges James pulled Steve in for a quick

embrace and jumped down the stairs to greet the rest of his guests.

"Nancy, looking as lovely as always, how are you deary," James smiled warmly and hugged her, Nancy a bit taken aback by his friendly nature. She always assumed rich guys had a cork up their asses and an ego the size of their house. She returned the hug and the smile, before she responded, "I'm doing just fine, thanks." James' smile grew to show his shining white teeth. He turned and looked a bit stunned when he saw Jonathan standing with a random girl he'd never seen before. He stuck his hand out for a handshake, his smile never faulting.

"J Byers, I didn't think parties were your thing. How might you be?"

"I'm doing pretty good. Aren't your parents gonna flip a lid when they see this," Jonathan shook James' hand and looked around. James responded with a shrug of his shoulders.

"The house is mine for the summer. They're in the Hamptons with my aunt and her husband, won't be back till Labor Day," he wiggled his eyebrows and looked to Margo, who was examining him while twirling an unlit cigarette in between her fingers. Margo's eyes were glowing warmly and she had a smile growing on her face.

"And who might you be," James asked, his eyes scanning over her body, and Margo grinned widely and bit her lip.

"Margo Sinclair, new to Hawkins. Just for the summer. Got a light for a lovely lady?"

She then wiggled the cigarette she held. James shoved his hands in his pockets quickly, searched for a bit and pulled a small hand lighter, then flicked to light the small flame. Margo leaned in and allowed the thing to be lit, her sultry eyes never breaking gaze with James. The flame illuminated her irises, their darkness suddenly ignited like the end of that cigarette dangling off her lips. James' tongue darted out to wet his lips and he looked at her starved for her attention, almost hypnotized by the stranger in front of him. It was a look of pure unadulterated want, of lust.

James returned the lighter to his pocket, and he reached out for

Margo's hand, which she gladly moved to return. Instead of a handshake, he lifted her knuckles up to his lips and spoke, with a growling husk in his voice.

"Enchanté."

Jonathan took notice of James' behavior, and a small ripple of anger rolled through him. His hand moved without him thinking, winding behind her back, around her waist to find her right hip. His fingers brushing underneath the hem of her cropped shirt and just above the waist of her jeans. He felt her skin, much warmer than his frigid fingers, and he gripped at the bone under her soft skin, drawing slow delicate circles with his thumb. He didn't want it to be such a delicate action, he wanted it to be firm and sure like Steve's grip on Nancy. His nerves got the best of him, so his touch was softer and more hesitating than originally intended.

James' face dropped and he immediately sensed Jonathan's mood. His body went from leaning in towards Margo, to slightly positioned towards the door. The gaunt boy in front of him was obviously making a statement with his hand on Margo, and the clenched muscles in his jaw. Back off.

Margo sensed it too. Her breath was hitching and stuttering as she puffed on the Newport, coming out in small clouds like a train. Her eyelids fluttered slightly when Jonathan's pinky dragged lower, hooking around one of her belt loops. The sudden aggravation in the boy's eyes and his demeanor was stirring up something in Margo's chest, something she long thought was dead and gone. The last time someone made her feel like this...she pushed the thought from her mind and tried to stay present.

You ain't ever gone hurt me again.

James led Nancy and Steve into the house, opening the front door and releasing a symphony of laughter, yells and blaring music. Multicolored lights streamed through the windows and the three teens disappeared into the house, leaving Margo and Jonathan to their own devices outside.

Jonathan pulled his hand away and mumbled apologies repeatedly.

Margo stared, delighted and curious, as he fumbled out an explanation.

"He's just...I mean I, well, he, he doesn't seem like...um," his stuttering melted away when Margo stepped in close to him, and the scent of her body spray (a men's fragrance, she had explained, smelled better and cost less than the women's perfumes) made him dizzy with desire.

"Johnny Byers, you're just full of surprises tonight," Margo drawled, taking one last drag of her cigarette before dropping it to the concrete and crushing it beneath her sneaker. Her hands crawled up his arms and came to rest against his chest. Jonathan's hands acted on instinct, coming to rest against her hips again.

"And you're the most fascinating and confusing person I've ever met," he replied, and Margo raised an expertly arched eyebrow in response.

"You confuse me because you don't hide anything. Most people don't let their guard down around a room full of strangers. But you...your emotions are always written right on your face. And you're just," Jonathan ended his explanation with a shrug, and Margo closed the gap between them by stepping even closer to him. Jonathan took a shaky breath and looked up into Margo's eyes, smiling back at her.

"You're just so beautiful like that."

Margo tilted her eyes towards the cars behind them, before she stepped away, and warmth bled from Jonathan's body. The sun had long set and now the summer's midnight chill (as his mother called it, Jack Frost's summer job) was present all around them. She looked back to Jonathan, who stared transfixed like James had been, and winked.

"Jonathan, I'm assuming I was the first girl to genuinely kiss you tonight." She questioned, and Jonathan stood dazed for a brief moment before nodding his head.

"Well let me show you something else I'm talented at," Margo whispered, and a chill ran down Jonathan's spine. The hidden implications of that phrase set his mind running sprints and his

hormones on a rampage throughout his nervous system.

Margo pulled him towards a cluster of trees off the side of the house, dark and quiet. The barricade of trees filtered out all the ruckus of the party, and once Margo released his hand, Jonathan felt a deep rush of adrenaline push him forward, then close the gap between Margo's body and his own. She stopped walking, bumping into him and whirling around, muttering a small, "Oh."

That's all she managed to get out before Jonathan pulled her up, his arms locking around her waist and her shoulders, and kissed her.

No one really tells you how it feels to kiss someone you want. It starts with a very simple look, one that's harmless. The person in front of you might stare as well, their eyes might dart down to glance at your lips before the distance between you both closes. That first touch, that first spark is the most beautiful thing in the world. Your lips connect and time slows to a dead crawl, and you're painfully aware of every part of your body that the other person touches. All you can feel is your nerves losing all sense of control; it's like electricity and fire and chills and a fever at once.

If she was the only girl he ever got to kiss, he knew he would die happy with that fact. Margo wasn't a short girl, but in this moment she felt small, standing up on her toes and curling into his arms. Her hands wound around his neck and Jonathan released her shoulders so he could grip her hips and walk her back against a tree. Her lipstick, red and fiery like her, was smearing all over but he couldn't care any less. His hands couldn't find one place to rest; they were in her hair, on her arms, moving up and down her body while tracing her figure. *Sweet Jesus*, was Jonathan's only thought.

That's when Margo's lips parted and her tongue darted out to tease at his lips. The older boy let out a slight gasp and she licked at the inside of Jonathan's mouth. Margo tasted like cherry candies and nicotine and a vanilla milkshake, and it made him tipsy. He was running out of air but he didn't want to stop, he wouldn't stop. Mimicking her actions his tongue moved up to meet hers and a soft sigh passed into his mouth from hers. He felt his world start to blur and within seconds he knew he was going to pass out from elation.

That little noise pulled Jonathan back, breaking the blissful moment with a snap of reality. Margo crinkled her eyebrows questioning, and then asked with a raspy voice, "Did I do something wrong?"

"No," Jonathan was surprised by his own voice which had dropped a few octaves.

"I couldn't breathe, you were making me feel a little high," he admitted, and Margo stared at him for only a beat before yanking the boy by his shirt back into her personal space, attaching their lips like there was no tomorrow. The first kiss was passionate, slow and cautious but this one threw slow and steady to the wind. It was frenzied, rushed and electric. Margo pushed Jonathan's hands down to her waist and broke the kiss only to start peppering his jawline with small burning hot kisses. Not used to the feeling, Jonathan's grip tightened and he let out a low growl, a surprisingly strong and possessive noise.

Margo went up to his ear and bit softly on his earlobe, then dragged her lips down the side of his neck while her hands ran up and down his sides. There was too much for Jonathan to feel; he didn't know what to think about or where to focus. His usually clear mind felt clouded, the words he had built up in his head were suddenly so sluggish coming out of his mouth.

"God...*that*...Jesus Christ *wow* that's...", he tried to slur but Margo just giggled into his neck, such an lecherous yet innocent noise Jonathan's entire head felt like it was going to explode.

Margo's mouth left his neck and returned to his lips, a blasted heat leeching it's way up to his cheeks. When her lips left his, Jonathan's eyes were too hooded to fully open, but there was a faint light shining onto his face.

"Oh shit," Margo hissed, and Jonathan's eyes slowly slid open, then rounded in shock. Margo was glowing, and not like in the way that his mother glowed when she was pregnant with Will.

Her eyes were literally glowing a faint green. It was like an old neon sign that was about to go out, flickering and dim but still eye catching. Her fingertips were glowing the same green light, but

brighter and humming. As if they were desperately trying to speak to her. Little green sparks danced from hand to hand, like the fireflies all around them.

“Please don't scream,” she pleaded softly, and Jonathan could only nod in response.

“I promise the sparks can't hurt you. They feel like nothing, see?” A tiny spark drifted up and landed on his cheek, like a fairy giving him a kiss.

One of the sparks began to collect light and ball up into a larger blob of energy, no clear shape evident as wisps of green moved all around. It hummed and sang tones, to which Margo nodded and turned back to Jonathan, her eyes glowing brighter now.

“This sounds crazy, but I think your brother and two other boys might be in very deep trouble involving a dangerous group of monsters called backsouls. Do you trust me?”

Jonathan hesitated, but once again nodded, frightened beyond words.

“Good,” Margo grabbed his hand and they started jogging out into an open field to the side of the house, just as Nancy and Steve came tumbling from the backyard gate. Nancy saw Margo's glowing hands and eyes, and promptly screamed before toppling backwards. Steve threw Nancy behind him and yanked a switchblade knife from his back pocket.

“Hey, let him go!” He threatened and Margo narrowed her eyes before tilting her head quickly to the side. The knife flew from his hands and clanked shut harmlessly against a tree. Steve's eyes widened and Jonathan stepped up beside Margo.

“Calm down. She said Will and the boys are trapped by these things called backsouls. We're gonna go help them. Come with us.”

“Explain to us why the hell you're glowing,” Nancy demanded, and Margo quirked an eyebrow.

“Hon, unless you want your brother to become ground puppy chow for a demon from a shadow dimension, the explanation can wait,”

she countered. Nancy's mouth snapped shut and she nodded rapidly. Margo turned her head to Steve, who nodded and gripped Nancy's hand tighter than ever.

"Great, seatbelts everyone!" She called, then whistled and Jonathan's jaw hit the ground.

The ball of light had flown almost a full 50 yards ahead, and opened into a gaping portal. It looked as if someone had taken a photograph of the landscape, then cut a huge hole out of it, before placing it over another picture. This other picture was of a road, and Jonathan could hear familiar screams as well as some not so great other sounds.

"Try to keep up, we need a running start," Margo smirked. She began to jog lightly, motioning for Steve and Nancy to copy her. Then, the pace quickened into a run, then to a sprint.

"On three were jumping through that hole, ready?" she yelled as they picked up speed. Nancy's chest was tight and she was heaving, not in shape enough to keep up with Margo's incredibly athletics. Jonathan prayed he wouldn't trip over his own two feet.

"One...two...THREE!"

The group dove into the portal and it felt like someone had turned on a giant vacuum cleaner. Jonathan's body was sucked through and warped, his skin stretched and nearly liquefied. Then, he was tumbling onto the asphalt of Mirkwood. His face hit ground before his body, so he rolled like a bowling ball. Steve knocked into him and Nancy landed with a yelp directly on both of them. They laid groaning and coughing, but Margo, as nimble and agile as a cat, hit the pavement on her feet without a sound. She looked back to the three on the pavement, blinking stars out of their eyes, and rolled her eyes.

"Jonathan, help me!" Will screamed, and Jonathan scrambled to his feet before gazing in horror at what stood before him.

Giant shadow monsters were holding Will by the feet and throwing him up high before letting him fall so close to the ground it looked like he would've been roadkill. Lucas was floating, head over heels

and arms dangling, unconscious, surrounded in a ball of blue lightning, which crackled and buzzed as shadows dragged long sharp claws down the sides. Mike was in the clutches of one of the so called backsouls, his skin glowing white as eerie blue light shined out of his wide open mouth and eyes.

Nancy screamed for her brother, which summoned the attention of one of the monsters. It snarled and began to crawl towards her, but then it was gone in a flash of green.

Margo was standing triumphantly, hands balled by her sides and surrounded by a halo of green light. Her skin was glowing faintly, and her voice was hollow and echoing when she spoke.

“You are not welcome here,” she growled coarsely, and shot a green bolt at the monster stroking the ball encapsulating her cousin. It shrieked and exploded, the ball of lightning disintegrating and her cousin dropping down onto a waiting cloud of green, saving him from the pavement below.

“This is not your world, not now and not ever!”

The other backsouls hissed and clicked, their slithering voices setting the three teenagers on edge.

Back, back back from the darkness, she's come back from the darkness.

“Damn right I’m back,” Margo roared, blowing up three more shadows with her bolts of green. Each shadowy form wailed and screamed in pain when it was hit, dissipating to nothingness and fading away. Will came tumbling from the sky screaming to high heaven, landing on top of Steve. They both fell to the pavement, and Jonathan pulled Will into his arms. He began to fuss over his little brother, inspecting him for injuries or slugs, but both quickly returned their attention to Margo’s impressive display.

The only backsoul left was gripping Mike tightly, and its countenance had morphed from a cruel sneer to a look of slight fear, mixed with bitterness. It threw Mike towards the group, flying like a ragdoll and crumpling helplessly on the pavement. Nancy cried out and fell at Mike’s side, clutching his head in her lap and weeping, begging for

him to respond to her. Steve joined her and checked for a pulse and a heartbeat, before starting CPR.

Jonathan couldn't help but roll his eyes; typical Steve Harrington swooping in to be the hero.

The monster let out a terrifying set of noises, each one setting the nerves under Jonathan's skin on fire. It slumped and began to swirl like a oil slick on the surface of the road. It extended a cold black tendril and gripped Margo's leg tightly, its face coming up and smiling into Margo's maleficently.

Darkness misses you, misses you deeply. You'll come back, come back and play in darkness.

Margo growled and spat, "Go to hell." The creature's horrific grin vanished and was replaced with a sneer.

See you there.

And with that, the shadow vanished.

Nancy was still hysterical, shaking Mike and frantically whispering over and over for him to wake up. Steve's CPR was all in vain, as the boy was still an icy shade of white and growing colder. Will began to shake and cry, whimpering and sniffing. Jonathan gathered his brother up into his arms and hushed him, trying to soothe his cries and keep his voice from wavering. Margo pushed over to Mike and pressed her hand to his forehead. She was quiet for a moment, muttering a quiet, "C'mon kid where are you?" Lucas groaned loudly and sat up, moaning about his head.

"Mike, Will," he called out, and turned his head toward the sound of Nancy's soft crying. He yelped and tried to run over, but he collapsed. Jonathan and Will rushed over to help the young boy to his feet and carried him back to Mike, who Margo was frantically trying to help. Her glow was fading now, and she looked weak, but she pushed herself to help the young stranger.

Finally, Mike gasped and sat bolt upright. Margo sighed and crumpled, and Lucas scrambled to hold his cousin. Nancy cried out

and grabbed her little brother tightly, who looked confused and scared in equal parts. Jonathan stood behind holding onto Will, who was smiling through a flurry of tears.

“Mike I thought you,” Nancy tried to speak but cried instead, and Mike leaned into her chest, his eyes heavy and closed. His chest heaved, and for the first night in a while, he knew he had somewhat of an idea of Eleven, and somewhat of a plan to see her again.

Jim Hopper didn't consider himself lucky, rather he ended up in the right place at the right time. And on this night, Jim found himself in the exact right place to find a group of seven kids in the middle of the road, while in possession of an empty police wagon. Jim also found himself listening to a very long winded and confusing story, consisting of multiple interruptions from multiple sources.

“Okay, so here's what I'm hearing; a bunch of shadow monsters appeared, they knocked you out,” here he gestured to Lucas, who nodded eagerly. “They were throwing you around,” Hopper deadpanned to Will, who shook his head and corrected him by saying, “More like Keep It Up, but with me and not a balloon.”

Hopper looked at the boy and nodded, reluctantly making a correction in his notebook. Then he continued with his reporting back.

“You, Mr. Wheeler, were out cold, and had a hallucination of Eleven and a...” Hopper looked at Mike in disbelief.

“To quote you properly, ‘Like the Silver Surfer, with no muscles and no face, just a giant hole for a mouth.’ And did this thing threaten you Mike?”

“Yes! It told me it would have me if it was the last thing it did,” Mike rushed to explain, but Hopper already had on his “authoritative and lecturing” face.

“Boys, we should've put last fall behind us. You especially, Will,” he looked towards the younger Byers, who looked a bit sheepishly towards the ground. “Besides, I'm confused as to whoever she is,” turning his attention towards Margo, who was stone cold unconscious

sleeping on the paved road.

“That’s my cousin, she glows apparently and she killed the shadows with her powers!” Lucas bubbled, and Hopper sighed and pinched his nose.

After talking to the teens and deliberating with the trio of middle schoolers, Nancy and Steve would take them back to the Wheeler’s, while Jonathan and Margo would be escorted by Hopper back to the Byers’ house. Their parents wouldn’t be notified, and it wasn’t possible to decipher who was more relieved; the kids or the Sheriff. Dropping off the boys and the couple wasn’t an issue. In hushed voices the older three decided to talk again the next day, while Lucas, Mike, and Will had dashed as fast as possible to the back door that they’d left open. Hopper promised them that their bikes would be dealt with by two of his deputies.

The drive to the Byers’ house, however, was a completely different set of circumstances.

7. Chapter 7 - A Midsummer Night's Drive

CH. 7

The car ride was mostly silent, the sound of the motor and the tires on the road providing background noise for the painfully awkward drive. Jonathan sat in the very back of the truck, with Margo sprawling across the row of seats, sleeping like a log. Margo's head rested in Jonathan's lap, her breath coming out in small puffs. Soft coils of auburn and copper had escaped her pinned hairstyle and were wrapped around Jonathan's fingers as he lightly pulled and played with her hair. Jonathan studied the girl like she was a photo, or at least as if her face had been captured through his lense. He couldn't help it; she was mesmerizingly mysterious and fascinating. The more Jonathan looked, the harder it was to look away. Meanwhile, Hopper looked at Jonathan through the rear view mirror, examining the sullen teen who he'd grown fascinated by in the past few months.

It was no secret to anyone in Hawkins that Jim Hopper and Joyce Byers had grown close in the time since Will's return in the fall of last year. He'd been seen multiple times buying groceries and driving not in the direction of his trailer, but towards the other side of town, where the Byers family lived. Joyce had also been spotted in the Sheriff's jacket, walking into her job at the grocery mart and also towards the post office. Not that anyone judged, but sometimes housewives just needed a bit of gossip to get their daily fix.

Back in the car, Hopper decided to do his best to bond with Jonathan. Will had taken a quick liking to Jim, and entertained him often with the stories of his Dungeons and Dragons campaigns. The older boy didn't seem to like the sheriff very much, but Jim didn't take it personally. According to Joyce, he always seemed a bit closed off from the rest of the world. She often caught him staring off into space or muttering to himself while scribbling ideas into a leather notebook with the word "PHOTOGRAPHY" stamped in gold letters on top (it had been a Christmas gift from Will, and Jonathan used it to design projects or take notes). Outside of his family, Nancy and

Steve, the oldest Byers didn't have many social connections.

"So, Lucas' cousin," Hopper started, coughing a bit to get Jonathan's attention. Jonathan shot a slight glance towards Hopper in the mirror, making brief eye contact before turning his attention back to Margo, who shifted and sighed softly in his lap.

"I'm not judging you, by the way. She's cute, really," Hopper continued, and Jonathan nodded absentmindedly.

"Oh, so you like her?"

"No, it's something different," Jonathan replied, dropping the curls from his finger and running a thumb over her cheek. Her skin was soft and warm, and Jonathan was enrapt by the grace of the sleeping girl.

"Jonathan, I can see your face you know. And we both know you're a terrible liar," Hopper commented. "I've seen your expressions during poker." Jonathan chuckled lightly, because the sheriff had a point.

"Did you...do anything with her?" Jim asked cautiously and Jonathan was so embarrassed he loudly blurted out, "No!"

Jim shushed him and Jonathan looked down to discover Margo looking a bleary eye towards Jonathan. She scrunched her nose in distaste, and turned back to sleep. Jonathan whispered an apology and Margo smiled softly back before dropping off. Hopper stared back at Jonathan, who was watching Margo with fixation.

"We didn't do anything, really. She did kiss me, but that was pretty much it," Jonathan confessed, and Hopper grinned.

"Well that's gotta mean something to her, right Casanova?" Hopper joked, and Jonathan blushed as they pulled up to the front of the house, Joyce standing on the front porch taking long draws from her cigarette, the lit end glowing like a beacon in the night.

Joyce had a large grin on her face when Hopper exited the car and made a move to walk down the stairs towards her close friend, but it

fell when she saw the back door open and Jonathan with his arm around a girl, walking her up the stairs. She sputtered a few noises that tried to be words to her son, who responded with a meek, "Hey Mom."

"Joyce, I'll explain in a second," Hopper cut her off and held the door of the house open for Jonathan and the stranger, who turned her face and smiled weakly, before yawning and looking down again. The two teens disappeared into the darkness of the house, and Joyce heard a few random noises before she heard another door, presumably Jonathan's bedroom, creak open.

"Jim, tell me this isn't a case of teen drinking gone extremely wrong," Joyce turned towards Hopper and took a drag of her cigarette, exhaling the smoke in a long huffing breath. She offered it to Hopper, who shook his head and pulled a fresh Camel from the box in his jacket pocket.

"I honestly don't know. I found them in the middle of Mirkwood, she was unconscious, Jonathan was comforting Will and Lu-"

"Will? Will's in Chicago with Lonnie, he's visiting. He's not getting back till tomorrow night!" Joyce interjected, but Hopper shook his head.

"It was definitely Will, Joyce. With Lucas and Mike Wheeler. They were talking some crazy story about monsters-"

"Monsters?"

Hopper tried to fully explain the story, but Joyce was growing more and more hysterical by the second. She was shifting uneasily and her speech, usually frenzied but still understandable, was growing panicked and confusing. Her hands were moving and shaking, and she was breathing rapidly.

"Joyce, Joyce, take a deep breathe. I promise you, Will is okay. I made sure of it," Hopper soothed, and Joyce looked at him for a brief second. Hopper took a breath and dove into his explanation.

"Before I came here, I stopped by my place and made a phone call.

Lonnie says Will took off after lunch, hasn't seen him since. He's fine."

Joyce sighed deeply, and inhaled the last few seconds of inhaling the last remaining seconds of smoke before tossing the butt to the porch and crushing it under her sneaker. She ran shaking fingers through her hair and closed her eyes in defeat.

"Why wouldn't he come home? He just..." she trailed off and breathed again, the sorrow defiant on her face. Hopper took her into his arms and held her tight against his chest. His familiar heartbeat soothed Joyce's rapid breathing, and her shallow rushed breaths slowed into deep inhalations.

"All you need to worry about is the monster talk coming from Will. I thought he was making progress with Dr. Sinclair, put the monster stuff behind him."

While that was true, Joyce still carried suspicions that her son wasn't alright. Lucas' mother had confided in Joyce that her son was responding extremely well to treatment, and spoke with confidence about Will's mental recovery. He had been diagnosed with severe pediatric PTSD, and his sessions involving "visions and vivid hallucinations" occurred towards the beginning of treatment, several months ago. Her son hadn't had a nightmare in months, at least to her knowledge (which was honestly minimal).

"In the morning, I'll bring Will home and he can talk to you directly. For now, I think everyone involved needs to rest, you especially. No use in stressing over this now," Hopper reassured Joyce. He pulled her in for one last hug, then wished her a quiet goodnight. The sheriff walked, his muscles stiff from the day's work, down the porch stairs and into the driver's seat of the police wagon. He waved one final farewell as he turned the starter over. The engine, sluggish from the long day, sputtered to life and hummed in harmony with the creatures of the mild night. The headlights flashed on and Hopper pulled down the gravel road, his eyes watching the woman he had grown to care about in the rearview mirrors. Joyce didn't take her gaze off of the vehicle until it had left her vision completely.

The night was anything but quiet. The din of the insects and frogs

kept a sense of life in the air, while the pitch black property was lit with only the porch light of the Byers. Joyce could only stand and wonder about the truth she thought she knew, and the real truth hidden from her eyes. Purely out of habit, she reached back and lit another cigarette, inhaling so deeply her eyes watered and her head spun. As she exhaled, she thought about her sons, the girl, Hopper, and the nightmares she had about them all. And there she sat, Joyce Byers, the mother, the fighter, the divorcee, the lover. Yet for all that she was, she considered herself to just be Joyce Byers.

Inside the Byers residency, Jonathan was helping Margo get into bed, more specifically his. He first started by closing the door and turning his back to her, so she could remove her jewelry and clothing with some privacy. By the time Jonathan turned around, she was wearing only her red tank from before and a pair of white cotton underwear. Her shoes, socks, pants and accessories laid in a heap on the floor, and Jonathan couldn't help but let out a silent squeak of a noise when he realized her bra was also lying in the pile. He tried his best to ignore it as she slowly laid down on his bed. She was still weak from the incident but she could move and talk relatively well. And talk she did.

“Was this your plan all along?”

Jonathan looked at her puzzled. Margo was laying on his twin size mattress, smirking and analyzing him with her dark eyes. Her curls were sprawled across the pillow she rested her head on, and she closed her eyes as she took a small breath, inhaling the scent of her surroundings. The room smelled like Old Spice deodorant and cigarette smoke, with a bit of a scent that could only be described as Illinois midnight humidity. It was comforting and foreign all at once, and Margo felt dizzy as she rested there.

“What was my plan,” asked Jonathan softly, and Margo smiled, wide and showing all her pearly teeth.

“Yknow, get me alone in your bedroom when I’m too tired to fight back, so you could lay down some moves?” The joke was weak, but thick with implications that turned the boy’s cheeks a hot shade of

red.

"I-I could never, would never even, not..." he started, and Margo cut him off with a weak chuckle.

"Relax, I'm just jonesing you a little. *Johnny* Byers would *never* do such a thing, right?" Her tone was daring, a taunt for Jonathan to put his money where his mouth was and prove he was a man of his word.

The teen stared down at the other, admiring her curves and form in the moon's glow. He wanted nothing more than to find every freckle, spot, birthmark and scar on her skin and kiss each of them, trace every bone that pressed against her skin with his fingers and his mouth, explore her in the night's darkness and create a map of her in his mind. Jonathan sat on his hands and chewed on his lip to control himself, trying to keep his mind off of the beauty he saw before him.

Margo wasn't much help. She kept looking up at him with large round eyes and fluttering lashes, giving him a look of innocence. Jonathan knew the innocence was completely false and in fact, more likely a challenge for him to kiss her. Her hands started to reach out and slowly trace up his bicep, and she scooted herself closer to the edge of the bed. Jonathan held his breath as she came closer to him but he simply reached up and took her hand from off of his arm and returned it to her side.

"Get some rest," he whispered, and as he turned to leave the room, her hand shot up and grabbed his wrist.

She didn't have to say anything for him to know what she wanted from him. Her scared eyes spoke volumes for her. Instead he simply nodded and slipped off his sneakers and his jeans, keeping on his shirt and his thin boxers. He then clambered, rather awkwardly, onto the bed, angling himself behind her and pressing their backs together. His hand reached behind him and wove his fingers together with the girl behind him, who sighed gently. They stayed like that, not looking at one another and attempting to restrain their hormonal instincts, until Margo fell asleep. Once she was asleep, she had rolled to face the same way as Jonathan. Her breath was warm and tickled his neck as it came in small puffs, and she moved so close to him that he could clearly smell her cologne. It was musky, deep and felt so

truly Margo. It set the small knot in his stomach that had been there since she kissed him spiraling and tightening into a larger, more pressing knot.

He was feeling something, what it was he wasn't sure, for this foreign and outlandish stranger. And despite the expected feeling of dread and anxiety, something about that knot made him feel so warm and comfortable.

Notes for the Chapter:

WHAAAAAAAAAAT HI GUYS

yes i am so aware this is WAY OVERDUE. i had a major life crisis and experienced a mental breakdown that severely damaged my functionality and mental health, but IM BACK AND IM READY TO WRITE (can you tell i'm on adderall?)

thank you as always for reading my story. there's a lot of ST fanfics out there and you chose to read mine, and it makes me happy :)

enjoy your sunday!!!

Author's Note:

hey all!

if you enjoyed the story make sure to leave some kudos or a comment, they always make me smile! i will be posting updates and new chapter links on my tumblr (3tymology) so follow that if you're interested. EDIT: school has begun for me and i am officially overwhelmed as fuck. two chapters every week is a wee bit too much stress for me so now i am aiming for one every two weeks, most likely on saturday night. thank you for bearing with me.

[side note: i will also be posting possible clues for the next chapter, answering any questions you have about me or the story, and giving some character

sketches if possible?? who knows!]

enjoy the rest of your day, and here's a reminder that if you lived in hawkins, dustin would definitely wanna be your friend.